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Friday, 18 March 2016, 11 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lykketoft ..... (Denmark)

The meeting was called to order at 11.10 a.m.

Agenda item 7 (*continued*)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

The President: I now invite the attention of the General Assembly to paragraph 21 of resolution 70/140, of 17 December 2015, which calls for a special meeting in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The Assembly will recall that, at its 80th plenary meeting, held on 17 December 2015, the General Assembly concluded its consideration of agenda item 70. In order to proceed on the item on today's agenda, it will be necessary to reopen the Assembly's consideration in order to hold the special meeting.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to reopen consideration of agenda item 70?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 70 (*continued*)

Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

Commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

The President: The General Assembly will now commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and hold a debate on the state of racial discrimination worldwide. All are welcome to this commemorative event. In 1966, the General Assembly decided that 21 March would be the day when the world paused each year to reflect on the state of racial discrimination in our world. The Assembly did so because it was on that day in 1960 that 69 unarmed and peaceful protestors were killed by the apartheid regime's police in Sharpeville, South Africa.

This year we are reflecting in particular on the progress made during the 15 years since the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, and it is fair to say that the picture is very mixed. On the whole, we have made progress, including by eliminating much direct discrimination on the basis of race, colour and ethnicity. But it is also true that the ignorance, prejudice and fear that are often at the root of racial discrimination continue to run deep right across the world. Millions of people continue to be victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, which have assumed contemporary forms and manifestations. Disturbingly, in the past 12 months we have also seen a rise in divisive political rhetoric and xenophobia in some parts of the world that targets refugees and migrants in particular.

Democratic societies will of course always face tensions in terms of managing the interests of different groups, but tolerance, cultural diversity, responsible political leadership and inclusive governance are fundamental to protecting human rights and ensuring that those tensions do not spill over into violence and conflict. And while individuals, civil society, the United Nations and others all have important roles

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to play in countering racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, ultimately each and every Member State bears the primary responsibility for their prevention and elimination. In particular, we must do more to live up to the commitments outlined in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. That requires targeted and immediate action, but it must also be sustained over time.

Indeed, from South Africa to the United States of America, it is clear that hard-fought victories against oppressive systems are not yet enough to overcome a legacy of discrimination. Eradicating institutional bias, and changing both attitudes and outcomes, is hard. It takes time and strong commitment. The 2015-2024 International Decade for People of African Descent has also reminded us of the need to be vigilant and stay the course on these issues. It seeks to address many of the lingering legacies of one of the most far-reaching forms of racism and racial discrimination the world has ever seen. And I am very pleased that we are joined today by our keynote speaker, Mr. Ahmed Reid, a member of the Human Rights Council's Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent.

In conclusion, let us remember all those who have suffered from racism over the years. And let us honour them by working together and taking concrete action to prevent further cases of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

I now invite the Secretary-General to make a statement.

The Secretary-General: I am pleased to join the General Assembly in marking the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. We should recall that the date of its annual observance is the anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre of peaceful demonstrators in South Africa in 1960. I am encouraged by how far we have come since that tragedy, but we still have a long way to go in our work for equality for all.

For this year's observance, we are commemorating the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Adopted by consensus at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, these texts remain the most comprehensive framework we have for international, regional and national action against racism. The international community acknowledged in Durban that no country could claim to be free of racism, and that is still true today.

We have undoubtedly come a long way in ensuring equal rights and non-discrimination. Member States have adopted or amended legislation to guard against racial discrimination. The General Assembly proclaimed the International Decade for People of African Descent, which will continue through the year 2024. Civil-society organizations worldwide working on racism are increasingly active and vocal.

But the persistence of racism indicates that we have not yet done enough. I am deeply alarmed by the surge of intolerance, racist views and hate-driven violence around the world. Racial profiling and violence against certain communities is on the rise. Economic hardship and political opportunism are triggering increased hostility against minorities. That is being manifested most directly in anti-refugee, anti-migrant and, in particular, anti-Muslim bigotry, attacks and violence. Extreme right-wing political parties are fomenting divisiveness and dangerous myths. Even once-centrist parties have hardened their views; once-moderate countries are seeing xenophobia increase sharply and once-sober voices have exploited fears in a dangerous echo of the darkest chapters of the past century. All of that increases the risk of societal fracturing, instability and conflict.

In such tumultuous times, we must stand up for the rights and dignity of all, and for diversity and pluralism. We must speak out against anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim bigotry and other forms of hatred. An assault on one minority community is an attack on all. I am also concerned that the political will that existed 15 years ago is under threat. The collective determination that enabled Durban's far-reaching agreement is being undermined by political expediency. The shared commitment to the universal values of the Charter of the United Nations is being tested. We must keep foremost in our minds the countless victims of racial discrimination. By implementing the Durban agreements, we can lift up not only those who suffer most profoundly but humankind as a whole. Non-discrimination and equality are the very foundation of our universal human-rights system. Let us unite to ensure dignity, justice and development for all.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

In accordance with resolution 70/140, I now invite Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to make a statement.

Mr. Al Hussein (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights): Fifteen years ago in Durban, the world came together to work to end racism. Never before had leaders sought to develop a comprehensive global strategy to address the roots of all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance. People of African and Asian descent, migrants, Roma, indigenous peoples and minorities; people with HIV/AIDS; and women, who face multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination and exclusion — all those millions of victims were the focus of the Durban Conference.

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the outcome document also addressed the profound injustice of religious intolerance — including Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, both of which are, shockingly increasing in many countries. This, the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration, is an opportunity to consider how far we have come. But, given the disgraceful persistence of discrimination across the globe, it must also be an occasion to renew our commitment to raising new generations free of prejudice and bigotry by taking further action. Unquestionably, there has been progress over the past 15 years. Many national action plans and anti-discrimination laws have been adopted or upgraded to comply with Durban recommendations. Those frameworks have assisted Governments to push back discrimination at the national level, and have enabled countless people to fight for equality. A dynamic network of civil-society actors evolved in preparation for the World Conference, and today those organizations form a strong and impressive array of active voices.

As the Durban Declaration states clearly, slavery and the transatlantic slave trade

> "are a crime against humanity and should always have been so" (*A/CONF.189/12, para. 13*).

Their legacy of violence, fear, deprivation and searing prejudice continues to be borne by people of African descent. Historically and in the present day, people of African descent are, and have always been, major contributors to development and the prosperity of their societies — but still today, they are frequently deprived of equal access to opportunities and services. I count the proclamation of the International Decade for People of African Descent and the adoption of its programme of activities among the achievements of the post-Durban process.

But there have also been challenges. Most alarming among them is the resurgence of racial discrimination and xenophobia in Europe and elsewhere. Migrants are becoming scapegoats for deeper problems. Violence targets foreigners and others based on their real or perceived race, colour, ethnic origin or religion. The archaic injustice of prejudice still stalks through modern life, generating daily humiliation and oppression for individuals, deepening divisions between communities and holding back millions of people from realizing their rights. Now more than ever, States must focus their attention on fulfilling their obligation to protect the most vulnerable sectors in society. We must be vigilant to ensure that the stress of factors such as rising unemployment is not displaced into racist harassment, abuse, discrimination and attacks. We must not condone the manipulation of such sentiments for political gain, or their manifestation in official policies.

Millions of people around the world continue to suffer the injustice and indignity of racial discrimination every day. It is urgent that States honour the commitments made at Durban and their obligations under international human rights law, particularly the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which has been ratified by 178 States. Human rights are universal and inalienable, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. They are universal because everyone is born with and possesses the same rights. They are indivisible and interdependent because all rights — political, civil, social, cultural and economic — are equal in importance and none can be fully enjoyed without the others. These rights apply to all of us equally, and when the human rights of one group are denied, that damages the dignity and equality of us all.

The President: I thank the High Commissioner for Human Rights for his statement.

I should now like to consult members with a view to inviting Mr. Ahmed Reid, member of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent of the Human Rights Council, to make a statement at this meeting in accordance with paragraph 21 of resolution 70/140.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite Mr. Reid to make his statement?

It was so decided.

The President: In accordance with the decision just taken, I now invite Mr. Reid to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Reid (Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent): It is a great honour to be here today. Let me express my gratitude to the President of the General Assembly, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and my colleagues in the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent for the opportunity to present this year's keynote address under the theme "Challenges and achievements of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action — 15 years after".

Ever since the establishment of the United Nations, the noble principle that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights has been the cornerstone on which the international human rights system is based. The rights of all human beings should be protected without distinction as to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sex, language or any other status. It was the strict adherence to this principle of equality and non-discrimination that led to worldwide revulsion and condemnation over the racially motivated killings of 69 unarmed men and women in Sharpeville, South Africa, on 21 March 1960, which led the United Nations, in 1966, to commemorate 21 March as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of its commemoration by the United Nations, and the fifteenth anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, let us reflect on the achievements to date and the goals yet to be attained to make real our collective commitment to the principle of non-discrimination, and our pledge to combat racial discrimination.

In 2013, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in general recommendation No. 35, stated,

> "The prevalence of racist hate speech in all regions of the world continues to represent a significant contemporary challenge for human rights." (*CERD/C/GC/35, para. 46*)

Today we are confronted with the painful reality that racism, racial discrimination, Afrophobia, xenophobia and related intolerance continue to pervade every corner of the global landscape. Over the past 20 years, there has been a steady rise in far-right populist sentiments worldwide, and in the number of political parties with their brand of racism and xenophobia. The global financial crisis and, more recently, the movement of a large number of refugees have resulted in growing incidents of racial discrimination and xenophobia, further resulting in a strong anti-immigration backlash, the scapegoating of migrants, racial prejudices, stereotypes and violence.

Racism and racial discrimination pervade all aspects of our lives — from segregated schools to gentrified neighbourhoods where people of African descent and other minorities are forced out of certain communities and into disadvantaged ones. I am a living example of racial profiling, feared and deemed suspicious because of the colour of my skin. I have been called the N-word. I have been told to go back home. I have had my passport unduly scrutinized by airline personnel. I have been harassed and humiliated by customs and immigration officials on my travels. And I have been followed around in supermarkets and department stores. The odds are great that I will have these experiences again and again and again.

The World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was an important step in the fight to combat those manifestations of racism. The staging of the Conference was an acknowledgement that racism and related forms of intolerance were global problems that required global solutions. The Declaration that emerged from the Conference outlined the sources and contemporary consequences of racism, the victims of racism and, more important, strategies, by way of a Programme of Action to achieve racial equality.

The Durban Conference was a significant achievement in comprehensively outlining a strategy to address historical wrongs and injustices. The strategy is embodied in the Declaration, which reasserted the principles of equality and non-discrimination as core human rights and assigns the primary responsibility for combating racism and related intolerance to States, while also calling for the active involvement of international and non-governmental organizations, political parties, national human rights institutions, the private sector, the media and civil society. As a mechanism to address discrimination, the Declaration called upon States to develop comprehensive national action plans to tackle, inter alia, the administration of justice and to create competent national bodies to

adequately investigate allegations of racism, xenophobia and related intolerance.

In examining the strategies put in place to achieve full and effective equality, a number of achievements attained through the implementation of the Programme of Action are worthy of mention. For example, an increasing number of States have established equality bodies supported by appropriate legislation and policies to combat racial discrimination. However, the implementation of the law also requires that States fulfil their responsibility as duty bearers and that civil society become actively involved. Member States have been collecting disaggregated data on people of African descent, which is important for enabling Governments to institute targeted programmes to eliminate racial discrimination.

Another achievement was the setting up of new mechanisms to address racism and other related issues. One such mechanism is the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent. The Working Group, of which I am a member, was established in 2002 to study the impact of racial discrimination and the challenges faced by people of African descent living in the diaspora and to make recommendations for its elimination. Another achievement was the General Assembly's adoption of the Programme of Activities for the Implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent, which recognizes that people of African descent represent a distinctive group whose human rights must be promoted and protected.

The Programme of Activities for the Decade outlines several impact-oriented actions for States in three areas — recognition, justice and development — to improve the overall human rights situation of people of African descent around the world. Stakeholders must use the opportunity afforded by the Decade and give high priority to programmes and projects specifically tailored to combating racism and racial discrimination against people of African descent.

While we can point to some progress having been made since the adoption of the Durban Declaration, the rate of implementation of the commitments made at the Conference to improve the lives of people of African descent, Asians and people of Asian descent and indigenous peoples has not been equal across States, and many challenges persist that further impede implementation. As the Working Group has monitored the human rights situation of people of African descent and undertaken country-level fact-finding missions, it has been a cause of great concern to see that indicators in the fields of education, employment, health, housing and infant, child and maternal mortality and life expectancy still show disadvantage in people of African descent and vast disparities between them and the rest of the population.

The colonial history, the legacy of enslavement, racial subordination and segregation, and racial inequality remain a serious challenge in many countries, as there has been no real commitment by States to reparations or to truth and reconciliation for people of African descent. This is another challenge we face in attaining the objectives of the Durban Declaration. In its provisions for effective remedies, the Declaration notes,

> "The Conference recognizes the need to develop programmes for the social and economic development of these societies and the [d]iaspora, within the framework of a new partnership based on the spirit of solidarity and mutual respect". (*A/CONF.189/12, para. 158*)

Some of the areas identified were debt relief, promotion of foreign direct investment, market access, technology transfer and investment in health infrastructure which, to date, have not been addressed in their entirety.

There is a clear connection between poverty and racism. It is not a coincidence that in countries that have had a history of trade in enslaved Africans the demographic structure is such that the poorest population group is disproportionately composed of racial or ethnic minorities. Confronted with systemic discrimination and invisibility, people of African descent face an uphill battle in claiming their rights as rights holders, thus perpetuating multi-generational poverty. As the development world embraces the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (resolution 70/1), which is grounded in international human rights standards and has the imperative of equality and non-discrimination at its core, the Agenda's framework will help countries integrate human rights into their national priorities.

The United Nations system and the Member States bear a tremendous responsibility in having to ensure that, in the interests of peace and justice, future generations may live in a world free of the scourge of racial discrimination and its manifestations. The commitments made in the Durban Declaration will be

only words if Member States fail to adopt them in their own policies and practices and take positive actions to create equal opportunities for victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Their value depends wholly on our courage, will and determination to honour them and give them meaning.

As we aim to transform the world in which we live through sustainable and equitable development, let us commit to ensuring that no one is left behind.

The President: I thank Mr. Reid for his statement.

Mr. Manongi (Tanzania): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of African States on the agenda item before us.

At the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa, from 31 August to 8 September 2001, the international community adopted the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, which was designed to combat those phenomena. Today not only do we commemorate the adoption of those texts, we also reaffirm and renew our firm global political will to their full and effective implementation, as well as that of the outcome document of the 2009 Review Conference.

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action still constitute the most comprehensive, action-oriented global framework to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. This commemoration provides a timely opportunity to assess the progress made in the implementation of the outcome of the Conference after 15 years. It also offers us an opportunity to identify the obstacles and challenges encountered and to find the solutions they require.

The African Group welcomes the progress made at the national, regional and international levels in conformity with the obligations and commitments of Durban. We are encouraged by those Governments that have adopted landmark and progressive legislative and administrative measures to effectively combat racism and racial discrimination; to protect the rights of migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and racial, national, ethnic and linguistic minorities; and to combat incitement to hatred based on religion, belief or colour. We recognize that colonialism, apartheid and political injustice have led to many of those forms of intolerance. We are also conscious of the fact that Africans, people of African descent and Asian ethnicities continue to be victims of those scourges and their consequences.

The persistence of those structures and practices have been among the factors that contribute to enduring social and economic inequalities in many parts of the world today. The African Group still commends the General Assembly's adoption of the International Decade for People of African Descent in 2015. Its theme, "People of African descent: recognition, justice and development", seeks to promote respect for and the protection and fulfilment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of people of African descent. We are of the view that Governments should reinforce protection against all forms of intolerance by ensuring that all persons have access to effective and adequate remedies and that they enjoy the right to seek, from competent national tribunals and other national institutions, just and adequate reparation and satisfaction for any damage as a result of such discrimination.

We continue to witness the discriminatory hardships the people of African descent continue to face across the globe. We commend international partnerships for promoting measures designed to enhance the full enjoyment of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights in respect of their diverse heritage and culture. The diaspora being the sixth region of the African Union, the African Union will continue to seize opportunities that strengthen bridges across the diaspora.

We appeal to the Secretary-General to include in his report to the seventy-first session of the General Assembly information on progress with regard to the revitalization of the trust fund established to ensure implementation of the activities of the International Decade for People of African Descent and its programme of activities. We appeal to the United Nations family and individuals to contribute generously to the trust fund. We request the Secretary-General to undertake appropriate contacts and initiatives to encourage such contributions.

The African Group recognizes the positive contribution that the exercise of the right to freedom of expression of the media and other new information technologies, including the Internet, can make to the fight against all forms of intolerance. However, we are concerned about the misuse of new information technologies as a platform for promoting intolerance as well as perpetuating other forms of slavery, including

child pornography and trafficking in persons. We are of the view that Internet providers should develop and abide by codes of conduct to prevent trafficking and to protect victims of trafficking, strengthen measures to prevent trafficking in women and girls and provide for their healing and rehabilitation, and address issues of international displacement. We urge the international community to support the implementation of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, adopted by the General Assembly in 2010. We look forward to the holding of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on trafficking in persons in October 2017.

The African Group believes that the right to quality education to all citizens contributes to more inclusive societies, promotes harmonious relations among nations and individuals and can foster mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity and the human rights of all. The Group reiterates its belief that justice requires that victims of human rights violations arising from racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance be ensured access to justice and effective and appropriate protection and remedies.

The Group welcomes the decision of the General Assembly to erect a permanent memorial on the premises of the United Nations to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. We appreciate the supportive activities intended to achieve that noble objective.

In conclusion, the Group condemns discrimination on any basis. We reaffirm our commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Durban Declaration. Collectively, we must accelerate our efforts to effectively implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action in order to sustain the momentum on the gains achieved at the Durban Conference. It is imperative that another world conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance be convened to build synergies on the assessed progress and new partnerships in the implementation of the targets and indicators of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. It is time to act now, if we truly want to achieve a meaningful positive change to curb the scourge.

Mr. Anshor (Indonesia): It is indeed an honour for me to speak on behalf of the States Members of the Asia-Pacific Group at this important event.

We wish to begin by thanking the President for convening this plenary meeting to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 2142 (XXI), adopted on 26 October 1966. We would also like to thank Mr. Ahmed Reid for his statement earlier, as well as to commend the work of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, which has contributed to the global fight against racial discrimination. The theme for this year's event focuses on the state of racial discrimination worldwide almost 15 years after the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

In September 2001, at the historic World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, we gathered in South Africa to call on the peoples of the world to engage in the global fight against racial prejudices with the utmost determination and perseverance. The message from the World Conference was undeniably clear that the struggle against racism is a struggle for human rights, dignity and the eradication of poverty. One and a half decades later, we must now ask ourselves whether our joint efforts to address the situation of the victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance identified in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action have truly made significant progress.

Racism persists despite the efforts of many groups and many nations. This annual commemoration therefore shows that the international community should maintain the determination and perseverance needed in the struggle to eliminate racial discrimination. This event gives us the opportunity to look at our achievements and emerging challenges. It is clear that much remains to be done. This event reminds us of the historic tragedies of colonialism, slavery and war, and the valuable lessons that we painfully learned. It also serves as an alert that, in today's world, racial discrimination can still become a cause of social unrest and violence. Nowadays, we continue to find various forms of racial discrimination, through social practices and discriminatory laws and regulations, that lead to poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization and socioeconomic exclusion, and affect the lives and livelihoods of a number of communities throughout the world.

It is therefore essential to reaffirm the political will to strengthen our concerted efforts in the elimination of racial discrimination. During this observation, let

us be reminded that we need to translate this political will into concrete and more vigorous actions at the national, regional and international levels to effectively implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. The involvement of all stakeholders, particularly civil society, the private sector and the media is also unquestionably imperative in this fight. The effective promotion of a culture of peace and tolerance to tackle racial discrimination does not and cannot rest solely on the shoulders of Governments.

Finally, on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group, allow me to once again proclaim our commitment and strong determination to ensure that the fight against all forms and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance remains a high priority in our respective countries and throughout the world.

Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

The Group of Eastern European States welcomes the meeting of the General Assembly in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which is being held under the theme "Challenges and achievements of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action — 15 years after".

Today's meeting is an opportunity to renew our collective commitment to the total elimination of racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and to the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. On this occasion, we pay tribute to the victims of racism, as well as to leaders and ordinary people around the world who have fought for human equality.

Over the past 15 years, efforts have been undertaken and some progress has been achieved. Yet, today it is clear that the ideals behind the calls for societies free from racism and discrimination are still to be attained. As the most recent report of the Secretary-General (A/70/367) shows, this phenomenon has not been eradicated, and no country can claim to be free from it.

The Group of Eastern European States remains concerned about the persistence of the scourge of racism and discrimination. This is a global challenge and we must be united to fight it. The International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination remains the basis for all efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate racism, and each State has the primary responsibility for the fight against this scourge. In this respect, we would like to reiterate the fundamental importance of ratifying and fully implementing the Convention, which should be a priority for all countries, and express our wish for its early universal ratification.

Mr. Abdrakhmanov (Kazakhstan), Vice-President, took the chair.

It is also important to further support efforts designed to promote intercultural dialogue, tolerance and respect for diversity. Education is a determining factor in the promotion and protection of the values of justice and equity, which are essential to prevent and combat the spread of intolerance. Continued cooperation between the United Nations and other relevant international and regional organizations to develop educational programmes aimed at countering all forms of discrimination in order to ensure respect for the dignity of all human beings and to enhance mutual understanding among all cultures and civilizations is of critical importance.

The Group of Eastern European States remains committed to the fight against racism and racial discrimination and will continue to make its contribution to this noble cause.

Mr. Webson (Antigua and Barbuda): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) on this occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The countries of GRULAC recognize both the challenges and opportunities presented by an increasingly globalized world in relation to the struggles to eradicate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. It is for this reason that the States members of GRULAC reiterate their unwavering commitment to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. This year's theme, "Challenges and achievements of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action — 15 years after", provides an opportunity for the international community and Member States to review policies both within our respective countries and internationally with a view to looking at and closing gaps and persistent racial barriers.

A decade and a half after the adoption of the Declaration, we have seen some measurable progress achieved by international communities in addressing

racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. However, decisive elements of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance are recurring in today's world in various forms often associated with the consequences of challenging socioeconomic conditions, limited opportunities, unemployment and poverty. The key elements in the fight against intolerance depend on an inclusive society in which all are given equal opportunities, the principles of human rights are taught and upheld, and a greater awareness and remembrance of past events, mistakes and atrocities are made known.

My delegation would be remiss if we did not mention one of the most significant achievements of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action in its assertion that slavery and the slave trade are crimes against humanity. GRULAC countries are pleased with the decision taken by the General Assembly to erect the Permanent Memorial at the United Nations to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. We encourage Member States, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and individuals to support that and other initiatives, which will serve to strengthen the message of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

The Member States of our region are as unique and diverse as the world has ever seen. We are multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual in our populations and the makeup of peoples. With our exceptional diversity come greater opportunities for our peoples. We recognize that encouraging the full participation and contribution of all our peoples is a significant route to fulfilling our own development goals. In that respect, the countries of our region firmly believe that sustainable development cannot be achieved except where it is achieved for all people, regardless of racial distinction. As our leaders gathered here this past year and adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1), the States members of GRULAC reaffirmed their determination to promoting the full inclusion of all races in our societies and to achieving a region and world free of racial discrimination. We recognize that no region or country is immune to prejudices. Accordingly, in celebrating the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the GRULAC region sees that as important.

The International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024 and the Latin American and Caribbean People of African Descent Action Plan are two important programmes for our region. Both provide the basis for taking concrete measures to address the expansive effects of racism and transformation on people of African descent. The coronation of those programmes is our seal to ensuring that such atrocities should never happen again. The passage of the landmark International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination is one such seal. In order to continue moving forward, as Member States we must move beyond eloquent speeches and continue to define concrete areas in eliminating the scourge of discrimination and in achieving political, economic and social inclusion.

In closing, I must remind everyone of the need for Member States to continue to raise awareness of the harmful effects of racism and the commitment of our leadership in promoting racial justice, understanding, respect, equality and diversity.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Exactly 50 years ago, one year after the adoption of the first international human rights treaty — the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination — the General Assembly proclaimed this important Day. But at very moment when nations adopted that fundamental document, Nelson Mandela was languishing in confinement in South Africa, which is evidence — as if evidence were needed — that our progress in the normative sphere sometimes outpaces current events.

We would also be wrong to believe that by eliminating a segregationist regime such as apartheid, we rid ourselves of racism once and for all. Accordingly, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination allows us to regularly reaffirm our commitment to establishing a just world, based on the conviction that all human beings are equal in their dignity and rights, and to remaining vigilant to the resurgence of racial discrimination, which can take many forms. We honour the memory of all victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination remains as relevant as it has ever been. Its nearly universal ratification

has invested it with an unquestionable authority in the area. The independent experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination contribute to compliance by following up its implementation and by assisting States in developing policies against racism and discrimination. At the same time, we acknowledge other initiatives to combat racism in all its forms, such as the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action of 2001. We acknowledge the importance of prevention and concerted action, especially in the area of education, and we recognize that the emphasis on practical and concrete measures can contribute to the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance.

Fifty years after the adoption of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and 15 years after the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, it is undeniable that progress has been made, but it is equally undeniable that many challenges remain. On this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, let us learn from history and from previous mistakes. Let us not make the mistake of believing that history cannot repeat itself. Let us all remain vigilant!

Mr. Sadykov (Kazakhstan): At the outset, I would like to thank the President of the seventieth session of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, for convening this commemorative meeting to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as well as the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Let me also thank the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon; the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, His Excellency Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein; and keynote speaker Mr. Ahmed Reid for their insightful statements. We also express our appreciation to the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent for its untiring and immense efforts to overcome racial discrimination.

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, as a cornerstone of global human rights architecture, is highly relevant and applicable in addressing contemporary challenges. In the environment of protracted armed conflicts and the resulting refugee crises, it is essential to prioritize the struggle against racial discrimination and xenophobia. A human-rights-based approach is needed to mitigate negative crisis-related hardships through the integration of refugees and to avoid heightening tensions in society through segregation and discrimination.

In view of the global war against terrorism, a scourge spilling over continents and State borders, our delegation considers it critical to act in accordance with the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Law enforcement and the provision of security should go along with respect for and the protection of human rights.

Racist attitudes and hate speech have also been deployed via social media and Internet platforms. Our delegation deems it crucial to appeal to civil society and business in the quest to prevent the Internet from being used as a vehicle for spreading hostile and volatile attitudes on the basis of nationality, religion, ethnicity or race. The only way to surmount discrimination and related intolerance is to combine the efforts of international and national institutions, civil society and business. The international community has the tools and experience needed to tackle discrimination and intolerance, and we call for strong political will and financial support to bridge the gap between normative documents and their practical implementation.

Since independence, Kazakhstan has declared to the whole world its policy of peace, trust and cooperation, based on inter-ethnic and interreligious peace and harmony. As President Nursultan Nazarbayev has said, for us the principle of tolerance is not only a norm of political culture, but also one of the key principles of statehood, which we decisively support and strengthen. Ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity is our precious wealth. We have managed to turn the historically inherited multireligious society into our strategic advantage.

As a State party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, my country is deeply committed to combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Kazakhstan is among the 57 States that have signed the optional declaration recognizing the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to consider complaints from individuals or groups who claim that their rights have been violated. We uphold our commitments under the Convention through a robust framework of laws and programmes enforced at the national and local levels.

The Constitution of Kazakhstan enshrines the principle of equality and expressly prohibits

discrimination in any form. The various ethnic groups, along with ethnic Kazakhs, are engaged in nation-building and enjoy the highest civil and social status, not as national minorities, but as citizens with full civil and political rights. Kazakhstan has established an effective system that ensures interaction and equal partnership between the State and civil society, the main mechanism of which is the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, a unique constitutional authority on issues of inter-ethnic and cultural harmony. The country has a doctrine of national unity to strengthen inter-ethnic mutual respect.

The Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions has made an important contribution to the consolidation of inter-ethnic and interreligious accord in Kazakhstan. That forum has received international recognition as an effective dialogue platform for the promotion of peace and harmony on the planet. Kazakhstan's model of inter-ethnic and interreligious tolerance has been highly commended by the United Nations and regional organizations, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia, the Commonwealth of Independent States and others.

Kazakhstan believes that the United Nations must continue to address the issues of race, racism, xenophobia and related intolerance, and thereby uphold human dignity for all. Kazakhstan, reaffirming its commitment to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, intends to continue to make every effort for the benefit of dialogue among civilizations and always stands ready to combat racism and related intolerance at all levels and throughout the world, as well as to honour and preserve the memory of millions of lives taken tragically.

Mr. Mminele (South Africa): South Africa welcomes the convening of this commemorative event to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The year 2016 marks 15 years after South Africa hosted the landmark and historic World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, which remains the only instructive outcome document of a major conference prescribing measures and remedies for the elimination of all the scourges of racism, as well as the atonement of historical injustices.

In the period following the World Conference, many achievements have been registered, particularly in Geneva in the creation of the Durban follow-up mechanisms, which ensured that the anti-racism agenda is profiled and visible in the United Nations human rights system. In addition to these mechanisms, the following key achievements need to be highlighted.

First, we underscore the significant proclamation and subsequent launch of the International Decade for People of African Descent in the diaspora for 2015-2024. It will be recalled that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action categorized Africans and people of African descent as the grouping that suffered the most in terms of historical injustices emanating primarily from the legacies of slavery, the slave trade, the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, and marked the momentous occasion in United Nations history where slavery and the slave trade were recognized as a crime against humanity, which in itself is another major achievement.

Secondly, we stress the commendable work undertaken by the follow-up mechanisms to Durban Declaration and Programme of Action — namely, the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, in developing the comprehensive Programme of Action for the Decade of People of African Descent and their collaborative effort, together with the intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, on the development of the programme of activities for the implementation of the Decade.

Thirdly, the unveiling of the monument of Ark of Return in memory of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade and to honour the contribution they made, as well as the inclusion of the World Conference of 2001 in the 20 major achievements of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights since the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, are further significant steps taken by the United Nations in its efforts towards the acknowledgement of the terrible suffering faced by the victims.

Regrettably, 15 years on there remains a lot that still needs to be addressed to restore human dignity and equality to the millions of victims who suffered and continue to suffer the terrible scourges of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, which continue to haunt the world today. Despite the efforts made, we have not yet attained a number of

key objectives that require the utmost attention of the international community. There remains an imperative need to end contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, which was the rationale behind convening the World Conference in 2001. This would be done by filling the gaps that exist within international human rights law, through the creation of new normative standards, namely, the elaboration of standards complementary to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which addresses xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and incitement to hatred. The perennial lack of progress in this area has continued to negatively affect our fight in combating racism and racial discrimination on these grounds.

The establishment of a racial equality index on the situation of people of African descent in terms of their socioeconomic development is still to be realized. That will serve as an important tool for identifying the key causes and manifestations of racial discrimination. It is regrettable that there remain many Member States that have reservations regarding key articles of the International Convention, in particular article 4. My delegation wishes to put on record that these reservations continue to negate the essence of the instrument and defeats its core objectives and purposes.

Furthermore, South Africa looks forward to the establishment of the permanent forum on people of Africa descent and to positive steps taken towards the reopening and revitalizing of the Trust Fund for the Programme for the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination. We believe that this will provide for the successful implementation of the activities of the International Decade for People of African Descent, the forum and beyond.

In closing, this commemorative event and the fifteenth anniversary of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action present an opportune moment for the world to unite and strengthen its efforts towards combating and eradicating all forms and contemporary manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, which have for far too long affected the victims. As we remember the Sharpeville massacre of 69 unarmed people, on 21 March 1960 in South Africa, we call on nations of the world to use the opportunity of this International Day to restore human dignity.

Mr. Menkveld (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Today, we mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. We commemorate all lives worldwide of people who fought against racial discrimination because of their desire for democracy and equal human rights.

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action provide us with a series of tools to tackle the scourge of racism. We must all work to give practical effect at the national, regional and international levels to the commitments we undertook in Durban in 2001. Let me reiterate, in this regard, the strong commitment of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Everyone living and residing in the Kingdom of the Netherlands is protected by law from discrimination; the ban on discrimination is enshrined in our Constitution.

The Netherlands recognizes that a vigorous approach to preventing and combating all forms and manifestations of intolerance and racism is needed. This includes not only effective legal responses, but also preventive measures that promote social inclusion, acceptance and equality for all members of society. The Dutch Government works hard to combat discrimination in collaboration with the business community, civil-society organizations and individuals, as discrimination is a shared concern and imposes a shared responsibility.

Last year, the Netherlands Government adopted a national guidance note for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent. Dutch activities during the Decade will serve to step up measures to tackle racism in the Netherlands in line with the new national interministerial action plan against discrimination, which is currently being developed.

Racial discrimination is unacceptable. We have to strive for nothing less than full elimination.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): We align ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States.

On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, I join the international community in reaffirming our firm commitment to combat all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Bangladesh would like to reiterate its principled and uncompromising stand against racial discrimination, which is aptly manifested in our Constitution, as well as in our entire legal and administrative framework. Our Constitution prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of race, religion, caste or creed, gender or place of birth. We promote international cooperation among and between nations irrespective of race, religion, ethnicity, culture and civilization.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Government maintain a zero-tolerance policy of all forms of terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization. Our flagship General Assembly resolution in the United Nations on a culture of peace, which receives overwhelming support from the comity of nations every year, is a testimony to our commitment towards the principle of inclusion and peaceful coexistence of diverse groups. We believe in unity in diversity. Our adherence to a culture of pluralism, communal harmony, democracy, freedom, liberalism, peace and development has long been recognized by the international community.

This year, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination commemorates in particular the challenges and achievements of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. As we mark this auspicious date, 15 years after the adoption of those landmark documents, we can see that people all over the world still face discrimination, suppression and oppression based on their racial, religious or ethnic identity. We are dismayed at the fact that hundreds of millions of human beings, including migrants and refugees, still suffer today from racism, discrimination, xenophobia and exclusion. Clearly, what was agreed to in Durban still needs to be put into practice.

We call for stronger international cooperation in eliminating racial discrimination from the world. We reiterate the importance of ratifying and fully implementing the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which is the universal foundation for efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate racism. As a State party to the Convention and an active member of the Human Rights Council, we support the Convention's comprehensive implementation.

All of us must also show strong political resolve and make further efforts to implement the recommendations of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. The new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1) also recognizes the need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies based on respect for the human rights of all. We must redouble our efforts to resolve all disputes that foment intolerance, discrimination and hatred. I hope the day is not far off when our collective efforts will succeed in creating a society based on tolerance, inclusion, justice, equality, equity and human rights.

Mr. Umetaliev (Kyrgyzstan) (*spoke in Russian*): Racial, ethnic, religious and cultural differences make our world more diverse. Kyrgyzstan supports the consolidation of the international community's efforts in the fight against the negative phenomena of racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. In that regard, we are particularly concerned about the growing incidence of racially motivated violence and increasingly frequent demonstrations of aggression in the public sphere, many of them in response to the mass migrations that have occurred in the past year as a result of events in the Middle East and Africa.

Racism, discrimination and intolerance are a global problem that should concern us all. These violations represent one of the most significant problems in the area of human rights today. We should also acknowledge that universal human rights norms and standards, which definitely include those of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, are the best guiding principles for protecting vulnerable people against racism and intolerance. We measure the value of international obligations in such areas by their implementation at the national level.

Our Constitution prohibits discrimination against anyone in Kyrgyzstan for ethnic, religious or any other reasons. We have adopted programmes designed to ensure ethnic minorities' political participation and social integration, as well as cultural and linguistic diversity. In addition, we believe that it is essential to increase our State structures' responsibility for preventing conflicts. In that regard, the Government has created a State agency for local Government and inter-ethnic relations, in which a monitoring centre for analysis and early warning of conflicts occupies a leading position. In areas that are densely populated by different ethnic groups, we have established social centres dealing with issues of ethnic relations. Regional

administrations have set up advisory committees that include local leaders of the various ethnic groups, along with activists and religious leaders.

As an active member of the Human Rights Council, Kyrgyzstan calls on all Member States to fulfil their international obligations in this area, regardless of potential negative attitudes to refugees and migrants from sectors of their societies, and to do everything possible to change people's mindsets and show them that the world is diverse and everyone in it is unique.

Mr. Zagaynov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We support the emphasis that the United Nations places on issues related to combating racism and racial discrimination. Unfortunately, even today we have not yet vanquished ethnic and religious intolerance, xenophobia and inter-ethnic tensions, and their hostages are national minorities, whose representatives frequently encounter different forms of discrimination. The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action remain the benchmark for States working to create programmes for combating such phenomena, and today's meeting represents a good opportunity for the international community to affirm its principled rejection of racism and intolerance in any form. The decisions taken in Durban were not easily arrived at, but they have enabled many of us to hope that racism can be conquered.

The Russian Federation consistently champions the promotion and protection of human rights without any distinction based on race, colour, nationality, ethnicity, religion or language. Our country is home to representatives of more than 180 ethnic groups, which makes our development of an inter-ethnic dialogue particularly important. A major component of that process consists of painstaking efforts at the national level aimed at creating and educating a tolerant society based on the principles of equality and cultural diversity.

One of our national priorities in combating racism, including in its contemporary forms, is the preservation of the memory of the suffering and losses experienced during the Second World War, the legacy of Nazism's criminal ideology, and the establishment of appropriate educational programmes. Last year's celebration of victory in the Second World War once again reminded the international community of the countless miseries that notions of racial superiority have brought upon humankind, and once again highlighted the significance of the Nuremberg trials and their key influence on the establishment of an international human rights regime. Sadly, even today there are cases where people still turn a blind eye to the followers of Nazism.

It is vital to ensure that we erect a sturdy barrier to the spread of ideas of intolerance and racial, national or religious superiority. Equitable international cooperation, mutual respect, the preservation of cultural diversity and open, constructive dialogue are the recipe for eradicating and preventing racism and racial discrimination. Guided by these objectives, our delegation, along with a growing number of the interregional sponsors, presents for adoption by the General Assembly an annual draft resolution on combating glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. We believe firmly that its adoption makes a real contribution to eradicating such shameful phenomena, and we hope to see broad support for that initiative in the General Assembly at its forthcoming seventy-first session.

Eradicating racism and xenophobia demands political will and consistent work on the part of the entire international community. We call for a united effort to achieve this still-relevant goal.

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 70?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.

United Nations A/70/PV.89

General Assembly
Seventieth session

Official Records

89th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 29 March 2016, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lykketoft ..... (Denmark)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 118 (*continued*)

Follow-up to the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade

Commemorative meeting of the General Assembly to mark the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

The President: Members will recall that the General Assembly held a debate on agenda item 118 and adopted resolution 70/7, entitled "Permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade", at its 46th plenary meeting, held on 4 November 2015.

Today's event provides us an opportunity to honour the millions of women, men and children who were victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. It is a day to remember one of the darkest chapters in our past and to recommit ourselves to doing our part to prevent a repeat of this abhorrent historical fact. As we reflect on the past, we should continue to pay homage to the sacrifices of enslaved Africans and their descendants and recognize their respective contributions to our world and societies.

The International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade focuses the world's attention on the unprecedented horror of the slave trade, providing us with an opportunity to collectively and solemnly reflect on the seemingly limitless scope of man's inhumanity to man. While we reflect on the past horrors, we must also confront the current and modern challenges posed by the many forms and manifestations of slavery even today. All too many innocent people, including women and children, are suffering owing to the indignity resulting from human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Furthermore, instead of being at school, many children continue to be exploited as child labourers. The challenges of modern slavery and discrimination that confront us today include institutional racism, gender discrimination, social and economic inequality, hatred and prejudice.

The theme of this year's remembrance is "Remember slavery: celebrating the heritage and culture of the African diaspora and its roots". This is a timely theme, as it draws attention to the vibrant African culture and traditions that have enriched life in societies once involved in the slave trade and how the African diaspora continues to enhance many aspects of daily life in countries around the world.

In 2007, the General Assembly adopted resolution 62/122 to create a permanent memorial to, and remembrance of, the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade and to acknowledge the tragedy and enduring consequences of the enslavement of African peoples. I wish to congratulate and thank the Permanent Memorial Committee, led by the Permanent Representative of Jamaica, Mr. Courtenay Rattray, for its tireless efforts that led to the successful construction and unveiling last year of that permanent memorial. That memorial — the *Ark of Return* — occupies a

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prominent place at the United Nations and is crucial to educating and informing current and future generations about the causes, consequences and lessons of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. I also commend and recognize the invaluable contribution of the Caribbean Community and the States members of the Group of African States for their sustained commitment to this annual remembrance.

I call upon all Member States and people everywhere to do their part to fight for a world free of all forms and manifestations of modern slavery, including discrimination, oppression and racism.

I now give the floor to the Deputy Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson.

Mr. Eliasson: I thank you, Mr. President, for your powerful statement.

Each year the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade provides an opportunity to remember and reflect on one of the most appalling injustices in human history. On this day we honour the memory of millions of Africans forcibly removed from their families, their villages and their homelands over hundreds of years.

This important day also directs the spotlight on racism, which, sadly, still prevails in today's societies. It is seen in untold acts of violence, discrimination, bias and prejudice all over the world, and it is shamefully represented by the millions of people still living in situations of servitude and slavery worldwide. Forced labour, bonded labour, child labour, human trafficking and forced prostitution are serious human rights violations rooted in a glaring lack of respect and regard for fellow human beings. They are an affront to the Charter of the United Nations and its reaffirmation of the dignity and worth of the human person.

Just as we reject the vile human commerce embodied by the transatlantic slave trade, so must we reject, and pursue this struggle against, all forms of contemporary slavery. Our battle cry must be a life of dignity for all: enough is enough!

This year we celebrate the rich culture and heritage of the African diaspora. We remember its roots, traditions and impact on the life of societies involved in the slave trade. Africans brought to the New World the great diversity of their homeland cultures. As they forged new lives with one another, as well as with other population groups, the rich varieties of diaspora culture took root and developed.

In that process, persistent efforts to strip Africans of their identity and culture failed. Instead, their vibrant and strong heritage endured and spread. We see Africans' legacy in the world in the bold art, in the vibrant music and in the inspired literature that infuse modern culture all over the world, and we very much see it in the contributions that the people of the African diaspora have made, and continue to make, in medicine and science, as well as in Government and leadership in society as a whole.

The trials and triumphs of the African diaspora also remind us of enduring qualities of human character: fortitude, courage, strength, tolerance, resilience, passion and compassion. Remember, nothing happens in life without passion; and the wrong things happen without compassion. Passion and compassion are therefore what we need to be reminded of in our constant struggle to improve conditions around the world.

Last year the United Nations launched the International Decade of People of African Descent. Much of the discrimination and marginalization of today can be traced to the slave trade. That is why the United Nations "Remember Slavery" programme is reaching out to young and old alike to create awareness, promote understanding and change attitudes. On this day, I ask all Member States and civil society to commit to ensure that all people of African descent enjoy equal access to education, employment, health care, development and other vital opportunities. It is long overdue for us to break the chains that have denied so many equality and the protection of their human rights under the law and in practice.

Outside this building in the Visitors Plaza, there is an iconic permanent memorial to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, and I want to join the President in thanking those who made it happen. I particularly commend Ambassador Rattray of Jamaica for his untiring leadership and efforts. The *Ark of Return*, as it is called, is a poignant reminder of the indignity and suffering of millions of men, women and children victims of slavery. I urge everyone here today, every visitor to the United Nations and everyone who sees this webcast to stand in front of it and reflect on the capacity for both inhumanity and humanity that resides within us. I ask that we repeat to ourselves and others the words from the Universal Declaration

of Human Rights, which we all pledged to defend in 1948 and which is equally valid, important and relevant today. We need to make those words a reality. It states:

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights";

"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person";

"No one shall be held in slavery or servitude".

Let us take those words and all the other commitments inherent in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Charter of the United Nations as our guide for now and tomorrow, so that we may bequeath a more fair and just world to future generations.

The President: I thank the Deputy Secretary-General for his statement.

Before proceeding further, I should like to consult members on inviting Ms. Sheila Walker, Executive Director of Afrodiaspora, Inc., to make a keynote statement on this occasion.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite Ms. Walker to make a keynote statement at this commemorative meeting?

It was so decided.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Walker.

Ms. Walker (Afrodiaspora, Inc.): We are here today to remember slavery and celebrate the heritage, culture and roots of the African diaspora. Most people do not want to remember slavery — some from feelings of guilt, others from feelings of shame. Most African diasporans do not want to remember slavery, when we think about the brutal treatment that our ancestors were subjected to. We prefer to forget slavery. To associate remembering slavery with celebrating seems very contradictory, unless we remember slavery differently, and unless we tell the story of the African diaspora in a way that indeed merits celebrating.

Current research makes such retelling not only possible, but even obligatory, if it is our intention to tell the truth about the Americas and the global African diaspora. Telling the story in new ways also fits with the mission of the "Remember Slavery" programme, which has as its mandate to educate people about the causes, consequences and lessons of the slave trade and slavery and raise awareness about the dangers of racism and prejudice. Telling the story in new ways also fits with the first theme — recognition — of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent. Recognition is a necessary foundation for the other two themes of justice and development. The programme of activities for the implementation of the Decade states that those activities should lead to greater knowledge, recognition and respect for the history, heritage and culture of people of African descent through research and education, promote the full and accurate inclusion of the history and contribution of people of African descent in educational curriculums, and raise awareness by providing information.

The questions that immediately come to mind when we listen to those ideas concerning those activities are the following: what do we know and what do we not know about the history, heritage and culture of people of African descent? What are the implications of knowing and of not knowing for people of African descent and for others? What do we need to know in order to create respect for this history, heritage and culture?

Today's International day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade should remind us of the foundational role that the enslavement of Africans in the Americas played in the creation of the modern world. It is also important, especially for the United Nations, to situate that Atlantic presence of people of African descent within the global African diaspora that reveals broader dimensions and implications. We should know, for example, the demographics of the Americas. Of the 6.5 million who crossed the Atlantic Ocean between 1500 and 1800, only 1 million came from Europe. Five and a half million people came from Africa; meaning that during 300 years of the 500-year history of the Americas, the overwhelming majority of the population of the Americas was of African origin. That is something that we need to know, and I suspect that most of us do not. The unremunerated labour of those enslaved Africans and their descendents enriched Europe and developed the Americas. Between 1650 and 1850, those Africans produced 75 per cent of the commodities traded in the Atlantic world, thereby fuelling the industrial revolution that created today's economic system in which we all live.

It is therefore impossible to tell the story of the Americas without considering the roles and contributions of the majority of the population that laid its foundations. When industrialization replaced slave

labour in the 1800s, people of African descent received no compensation for centuries of unpaid work. In the British, French and Spanish empires in Brazil and in Washington, D.C., enslavers, however, were rewarded by their Governments with generous compensation from the loss of the income that they would no longer derive from the free labour of their former human property. In that way, the same people who for hundreds of years were enriched by the enslavement of people of African descent were further enriched by their slaves' emancipation.

It is generally assumed that the Africans who were enslaved were enslaved as just unskilled workers. Such a perspective makes absolutely no sense, given that Africans were brought across the Atlantic to create new societies in natural environments that were more familiar to them than they were to their enslavers. Some Africans were enslaved precisely because of their skills and knowledge, and they provided a transfer of technology from Africa to the Americas. People from what was called the Gold Coast, now Ghana, whom the Portuguese and Spanish called *negros minas* — or mine negroes — were selected for their expertise in gold mining and metallurgy. In Ecuador and Colombia, descendants of *negros minas* still pan gold and transform it into beautiful creations. African knowledge also helped to feed the Americas in Brazil, Jamaica, Suriname and the United States. Enslaved Africans planted rice, which had been domesticated 3,500 years ago in Mali, not in Asia. It was Oryza glaberrima, which is an African species of rice. Plantation owners in the United States asked slave-ship captains to bring them "rice negroes" known for their expertise in the grain's complex cultivation and preparation techniques. South Carolina became North America's richest plantation economy thanks to that African rice.

In addition to bringing systems of knowledge with them to the Americas, Africans maintained and recreated their cultures. Almost half of the Africans came from Angola, the Congos and Gabon — the Central African region over which the powerful Kongo Kingdom reigned for centuries. In the Americas today, Brazil's Congadas and Panama's Congos perpetuate memories of royal traditions from the Kongo Kingdom in their festivities. I had hoped to be able to show the Assembly images of those celebrations and continuities, but apparently that is not done in this kind of setting. Therefore, I hope there will be another occasion on which I can show members what I am telling them about.

Descendants of the Yoruba people of Nigeria and Benin, in West Africa, were concentrated in Brazil and Cuba. As a result, in Brazil and Cuba the spiritual beings of the Yoruba, which represent forces of nature, continue to be fed. In their celebrations, the descendants of the Yoruba dance, drum and sing as those forces of nature visit their human children.

Today there are about 200 million people of African descent living in all of the nations of the Americas, without exception, from Chile to Canada, including in unexpected places. In that regard, I would have shown members images of Afro-Bolivians and Afro-Argentines; maybe they have not seen them. The name of my favourite Bolivian is Juan Angola Maconde. There is therefore African culture every place in the Americas. The historical contributions of those Africans and the living traditions trace an African map of the Americas.

Beyond the Atlantic world, people of African origin also live across the Mediterranean Sea in Turkey, where descendants of Africans enslaved during the Ottoman Empire affirm their identity as Afro-Turks. In May the Feast of the Calf, which I attended a couple of years ago, will again be celebrated. Africans also travelled across the Indian Ocean, voluntarily as well as involuntarily. India has several totally distinct populations of African origin from different parts of Africa living in different parts of India, speaking different languages and writing in different ways. I do not need to tell the Assembly everything about them because, if members go out into the hall, they will see images of the tradition of elite Afro-Indians and Afro-Indian rulers.

Unlike the Americas, where there was no workforce and where Africans became the workforce, India needed no such workforce. Members will see, for example, Malik Ambar, who was an enslaved Ethiopian from the Harar district who went on to become a general and then ruler of Ahmednagar, near the Indian coast. Afro-Indians also built monuments. Members will see an image of the Sidi Saiyyed Mosque in Gujarat. They will see Janjira Island, from which Afro-Indians ruled a princely State and controlled maritime traffic on the Kangani coast.

There are also Africans who went to India voluntarily. One was Bava Gor, who was an agate merchant who transformed the technology of agate production. He also had spiritual powers that allowed him to defeat a demoness. A shrine was built in his

honour, and now both Sidis and many non-Sidis go there to worship him as an African saint. The Sidis play for him instruments of African origin, including the malunga, which is exactly the same as the berimbau in Brazil. As members can see, this African map transcends the Americas and links the cultures of the communities of the African diaspora across various oceans and continents.

A colleague and I made a documentary, entitled *Slave Routes: A Global Vision*, for the UNESCO Slave Route Project. It was shown here several years ago. I also showed it to a group of Afrodescendant adolescents in Brooklyn, and they had very interesting comments that went to the root of the problem raised in telling new stories and creating new narratives about slavery and the African diaspora. One student asked,

> "Why haven't we been told the whole story about African people? Like that we're not just here in the United States but are all over the world? Not only throughout the Americas, but even in places we'd never think about, like India, where Africans were even rulers? Why don't they teach us in school the kinds of things you showed us in this film?"

The next student said,

> "Why haven't we learned that some Africans were enslaved for how smart they were? Why were we taught that they were all dumb and did mindless work on plantations and got whipped by people who owned them? Who wants that as the only image of our ancestors?"

A third student added,

> "Yeah, why doesn't school teach us stuff that would make us proud of our ancestors, and make other people respect us? They only want us to learn stuff that makes us ashamed to be descendants of enslaved people. It's like they're hiding the good part of the truth."

Whereas the programme of activities for the International Decade for People of African Descent recommends ensuring that textbooks and other educational materials reflect historical facts accurately as they relate to past tragedies and atrocities, the Brooklyn teenagers insisted that there was already too much focus on tragedies and atrocities and on victimization.

It is therefore indeed necessary to educate people about the horrors of the slave trade and slavery, because their consequences continue to determine and explain today's prejudiced attitudes and racist behaviours. I am sure members can think of many of those. For educational materials to reflect historical facts accurately, they must also highlight the accomplishments and contributions of people of African descent in spite of the tragedies and atrocities. The Brooklyn students, and their peers elsewhere in the diaspora with whom I have spoken, want their schools to teach them more complete, truthful and empowering knowledge that will give them a sense of global citizenship. And they also want their education to offer them an honest narrative that will allow them to feel good about themselves and their heritage and inspire the esteem of others.

Raising awareness and creating respect for the history, heritage and culture of people of African descent by generating new research-based narratives and institutionalizing them in educational curriculums is a stated goal for the Remember Slavery Programme and for the Decade. Some of us are already deeply involved in shaping and sharing such new narratives, and are seeking committed and conscientious collaboration to further the process. I invite members to collaborate in remembering that, in spite of the slave trade and slavery, people of African descent and the global diaspora have made major contributions to civilization that merit celebrating because they have enriched us all.

Mr. Nduhuura (Uganda): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of African States. I represent His Excellency Mr. Tuvako Nathaniel Manongi, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the United Republic of Tanzania to the United Nations, who is the Chair of the Group for the month of March.

Once again, around this time every year, we assemble to mark this day established by resolution 62/122 to honour the memory of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade and to raise awareness of the dangers of racism and prejudice today. I wish to extend our gratitude to the steering committee, which counts the States members of the Caribbean Community and the African Group among its members, and the Department of Public Information for the planned activities and events for the Remember Slavery Programme.

The stories of heroism and determination and our common heritage as humankind are evident in the aspiring drama about Jesse Owens' fight to become a legend and take part in the 1936 Olympic Games, as portrayed in the movie entitled *Race*. One of the exhibits in the United Nations Visitor's Lobby, entitled "Africans in India: From Slaves to Generals and Rulers", is yet another inspiring piece. The populations mainly came from the East Africa region, including Ethiopia and the coastal areas extending from Dar es Salaam all the way to the Horn of Africa.

In that regard, once again we see a clear link between India and Africa. We have a shared history in trade, music, religion, arts and architecture, but the historical link between those two diverse regions is rarely discussed. Although many Africans travelled to India as slaves and traders, they eventually settled down in India to play an important role in India's history of kingdoms, conquests and wars. According to Sylviane A. Diouf of the Schomburg Center,

> "Abyssinians, also known as Habshis in India, mostly came from the Horn of Africa to the subcontinent."

She goes on to say that

> "Africans were successful in India because of their military prowess and administrative skills. African men were employed in very specialized jobs, as soldiers, palace guards or bodyguards. They were able to rise through the ranks, becoming generals, admirals and administrators."

The most celebrated of the powerful Ethiopian leaders in India was Malik Ambar, who lived between 1548 and 1626.

Why is it important to celebrate those linkages that exist in several parts of the world? It is important because wherever people of African descent went in captivity and slavery, they emerged victorious and contributed tremendously to the economy, art, culture, music and heritage of those who were their masters. We are all familiar with the slogan "hakuna Matata" in Kiswahili, which is a unique combination of roots drawn from Bantu languages, Portuguese, Hindi and Arabic. That is a concrete example of African roots.

The diaspora culture of the people of African descent is a mosaic that is reflected all over the world today. The Gullah, Maroon and Nova Scotia are peoples taken from the shores of Africa to the Americas, people who fought and obtained their freedom. A significant example is that of the *Amistad* case, which unified and advanced the abolitionist movement in the United States. Today we have the permanent memorial on the grounds of the United Nations Headquarters. It is yet another ship, called the *Ark Of Return*, which marks the real and symbolic return of our people, their culture and heritage — to acknowledge the tragedy, consider the legacy, lest we forget: *asanteni sana.*

Mr. Anshor (Indonesia): It is indeed an honour for me to speak on behalf of the States members of the Asia-Pacific Group as its Chair for the month of March.

At the outset, I wish to begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for convening this commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, in accordance with resolution 62/122, of 17 December 2007.

The transatlantic slave trade was the largest forced migration in history, resulting in the extensive exodus of Africans to many areas of the world from 1501 to 1830. As we remember those who suffered and died over that 400-year period, let us be reminded of the necessity to oppose any form of slavery in the modern world.

Various efforts have been made in recent years on this matter. One of them was the permanent memorial to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, which was unveiled just last year and serves as a reminder of the legacy of the slave trade. More than that, it provides current and future generations with an understanding of the history and consequences of slavery, and represents a tool to raise awareness about the current dangers of racism, prejudice and the lingering consequences that continue to impact many communities around the world today. It also underlines the need for all countries to make a collective effort to mobilize all stakeholders to learn the lessons of the transatlantic slave trade and to communicate the dangers of racism and prejudice, which, unfortunately, still exist to this day.

Other valuable efforts have also been made at the national, regional and global levels in the fight against any kind of slavery. Nevertheless, this annual observance provides us with an avenue to remind ourselves of the importance of putting this fight on our list of priorities. We should not be complacent with regard to the normative frameworks we have put in place as a common reference; we have to continue

to strive for their realization in concrete policies and practices.

Fighting racism and racial discrimination means fighting poverty at the same time. Therefore, a stronger legal framework to improve policies and practices to deal with discrimination on any grounds is key. Concrete steps to encourage equal opportunity for all people, including people of African descent, should also be made in order to achieve sustainable development.

The theme of this year's observance focuses on the rich African culture and traditions that have impacted life in countries that were involved in the slave trade and where the members of the African diaspora continue to make major contributions in all aspects of life. Various activities have been held since last month to celebrate that legacy. It is our view that it is important to celebrate this legacy and treat it as a valuable tool to remind us, time and time again, of the strong and collective commitment of the international community to fight racial discrimination, bigotry and prejudice, as well as to learn from the courage and resilience of the unsung heroes of the transatlantic slave trade.

Finally, on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group, allow me to reiterate our steadfastness to fight all forms and manifestations of slavery, as well as our commitment to honour and celebrate the heritage and culture of the African diaspora and its roots.

Ms. Mammadova (Azerbaijan): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Every year on this day, the United Nations honours and remembers the millions of people who suffered and died in slavery. We pay tribute to those who suffered the cruelty and injustice of the transatlantic slave trade, the largest forced migration in history, and lost their lives at the hands of the brutal slavery system that lasted over 400 years.

Last year, we witnessed the unveiling ceremony of the *Ark of Return*, the permanent memorial that now occupies a prominent place here at United Nations Headquarters. As a fitting contribution to honour the victims of slavery, the memorial serves as and will continue to be a powerful reminder of the unbearable hardship and death of millions of innocent people, a powerful reminder of the tragic legacy of the slave trade and the need to continue to fight racism and prejudice.

The International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade also offers an opportunity to recall that slavery in its contemporary forms, such as trafficking in human beings, continues to exist in all parts of the world, and warrants increased attention from the international community. To that end, we, the Member States, undertake decisive concerted efforts, in particular through the implementation of international documents such as the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto and other relevant documents such as the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons. We also commend the work of the United Nations system and its agencies and mechanisms in assisting States in countering such inhumane and shameful practices. In that context, education and awareness-raising are essential components of the fight against slavery and slavery-like practices. We welcome the various outreach activities and programmes organized by the Department of Public Information to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance in March of each year.

The International Decade for People of African Descent, which will continue until 2024, is another important vehicle for showcasing the valuable contributions that enslaved people and their descendants made to the societies that forced them into bondage. This year's thematic focus for the International Day and its commemoration, "Remember slavery: celebrating the heritage and culture of the African diaspora and its roots", is aimed at highlighting the rich and diverse African culture and traditions that have influenced the whole world, and will do much to raise awareness of the cultural linkages among people of African descent throughout the world and of the African diaspora's contributions to society, including in the areas of culture, medicine, science, sport and spirituality.

In conclusion, the States members of the Eastern European Group join the entire international community in commemorating this important day, which celebrates the struggle and subsequent achievements of the people emancipated from the scourge of physical slavery. It is indeed a day of celebration, but it is also a day to take stock and to deepen our resolve to tackle contemporary challenges, combat modern forms of slavery and safeguard freedom and dignity for all. It goes without saying that the Eastern European Group remains committed to collaborating on that noble pursuit.

Mr. Webson (Antigua and Barbuda): I have the honour to speak this afternoon on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) on the observance of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This year the theme of the commemoration is "Remember slavery: celebrating the heritage and culture of the African diaspora and its roots".

The transatlantic slave trade constitutes one of the worst violations of human rights in our history. For almost a decade, the United Nations and the international community have set aside this time each year for the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade to honour all those who died as a result of slavery and to consider the causes, consequences and long-term impact of the slave trade on those who were enslaved and those who are still affected today, in order to ensure that this horrific abuse of humankind does not recur.

For more than 400 years, more than 15 million African men, women and children were victims of the transatlantic slave trade, one of the worst periods in the history of humankind. From 1501 to 1830, the largest forced migration, under some of the most inhumane conditions in recorded history, took place during the transatlantic slave trade, through which many were cast into forced labour. Those who survived that shameful horror were unloaded at ports throughout Latin America and the Caribbean into a life of forced labour and systematic cruelty. The developed countries and their riches were built on the backs and abuse of the violation of human rights that was forced African labour. The practice and its cost unquestionably represent a crime against humanity and should never be forgotten or allowed to raise their ugly heads again anywhere in the world, regardless of race, class or religion. This phenomenon should remain part of the previous chapters of our history, but it should never be forgotten.

Sadly, the reverberations of this unparalleled period for humankind were manifested not only in its victims at the time but, as we have already heard this afternoon, still emerge today in the emotional, mental and physical trauma and the other negative impacts that continue to affect people of African descent, the current generation and those as yet unborn, who will also feel the repercussions of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. As we strive to eliminate the racism and prejudices that are direct results of the slave trade, we must be sure never to forget.

Those who were responsible for that crime still benefit the most. They are still the very same ones who today lay claim to leadership in our world, keep a strong hold on it and make the decisions in it. The struggle for full and absolute emancipation remains a continuing endeavour and priority, and is essential to the fight for full freedom. The brutality of chattel slavery forced on so many of a particular segment of humankind remains a burden and continues to be felt by all. The continued emotion resulting from that past is still to be seen in the fight against colonialism around the world. Many countries, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean region, are still colonized, and we continue to seek the fulfilment of the United Nations pledge of total freedom for all countries. Latin America and the Caribbean remain committed to that role of the Organization. Economic and social inequality persist, and a change in the social order in parts of the world must be enforced. In our region, we will continue to commit fully to the work of the United Nations in that regard. Indeed, many members of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, including Antigua and Barbuda, are committed members of the Decolonization Committee and dedicated to its tasks.

The Latin American and the Caribbean region takes note of the important report (A/70/221) of the Secretary-General and of the achievements outlined therein. We are proud of, and pleased with, the announcement concerning the International Decade for People of African Descent. We also proudly appreciate the work of the committees that has enabled us to stand here in the Hall while outside we have a memorial we will never forget, and that will remind us of the atrocities of slavery forever. At the national level, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have undertaken significant initiatives aimed at celebrating the Decade. GRULAC is proud that many countries are sharing information, knowledge and experience about the legacy of the African people. The Group is particularly overjoyed by the permanent memorial created in remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade that is situated outside these walls, and will always revere it. It is a significant achievement whereby we can ensure that we will never forget.

In conclusion, GRULAC member States join the wider international community in observing this important day, which highlights the struggle and

subsequent achievements of the people who were emancipated from the curse of slavery. It is indeed a day to celebrate, but also a day for us to take stock and to cement our determination to confront today's challenges of inequality, poverty, colonialism and prejudice, all of them elements that still help to support the philosophy that holds one race superior and another inferior. That ideology must be discredited and abandoned, even in its most contemporary form.

We are a strong people and a rising people. We will continue to rise up from this unparalleled tragedy in the history of our planet. The liberation of the many African men, women and children who endured torment, torture and attempted dehumanization, and who fought against considerable odds to defeat slavery, will never be forgotten. The African people and people of African descent will stand together. While others may turn their heads away and attempt to forget, we will never allow this scourge to recur, or others to forget.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Today we honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, that shameful commerce that, beginning in the sixteenth century and continuing for several hundred years, exploited millions of human beings — men, women and children — by reducing them to cargo crammed aboard slave ships sailing for the Americas to be bought, sold and exchanged.

While slavery has existed at various periods and in various civilizations, the magnitude of the transatlantic slave trade made it a unique phenomenon in modern history. Its abolition, in 1807, marked the beginning of an important evolution that, truthfully, is still ongoing, because the ideology that justified slavery has not been completely eradicated. Racism and discrimination based on a belief in a hierarchy of race and skin colour are, sadly, still with us today, as we heard in the statements made in this Hall on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on 18 March (see A/70/PV.88). And every year, thousands of people fall victim to modern forms of slavery and human trafficking.

The permanent memorial, the *Ark of Return*, erected last year at the Organization's Headquarters, is there to testify to the importance we all attach to ensuring that the blatant injustice that was the slave trade, and the atrocities that went with it, is not forgotten. The memorial's inauguration coincided with the proclamation of the International Decade for People of African Descent, whose purpose is to protect and promote the rights of people of African descent and to acknowledge their heritage and the contribution they have made to enriching our cultures. This year's theme encourages us not only to reflect on those events but also to celebrate the heritage and culture of the African diaspora and its roots, for the fact that despite the inhuman conditions in which slaves were transported from Africa to the Americas, despite the uprooting and repression they suffered for many generations, many of those brave men, women and children were able to preserve and develop their heritage, is a testament to their remarkable resilience.

Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Their dances, singing and rhythms have enriched other cultures and produced, among other things, the gospel music, blues, jazz and rock that have accompanied the emancipation of generations of young people. Writers of African descent have enriched English, Spanish, Portuguese and French literature, and people of African descent have made contributions to the sciences, medicine and education that have benefited all of us. Despite being denied their most basic human rights, people of African descent have persevered. They have reclaimed their rights and reminded us of the true meaning of equality in dignity and rights. That is the message of hope we read in their destiny.

Martin Luther King, Jr., said that injustice anywhere was a threat to justice everywhere. Similarly, the injustices committed in the past against the dignity of slaves, and the discrimination that people of African descent may face today, constitute an injustice against humankind.

Ms. Butts (United States of America): Today we pay tribute to and honour the memory of the millions of women and men, girls and boys robbed of their fundamental freedoms and lives through the transatlantic slave trade. The horrors of slavery are a collective stain on our history. Families were destroyed, communities decimated and nations divided. The United States recognizes the enduring impact of slavery and the fact that we must work collectively to always remember its devastation, understand its truth and strive to heal its wounds.

President Obama recognized that in a recent speech given during his historic visit to Cuba, in which he noted our two countries' shared history of slavery,

both built in part by slaves from Africa, as well as of segregation and the continuing challenges of racial bias. But he also recognized the great strides that the United States has taken because of the openness of American democracy, which has enabled us to do better through the protest, debates and popular mobilization that laid the groundwork for a son of Africa and the African diaspora to become President of the United States.

Today we must also celebrate the wealth of the contributions that descendants of African slaves have made, and continue to make, in our lives. From the freed slaves who shared their stories through slave narratives, such as Harriet Jacobs, Solomon Northup and Nat Turner; to the leaders of the abolitionist movement — Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth; to the early educators and agitators against segregation and lynchings who paved the way for the modern civil rights movement, such as Anna Julia Cooper, W.E.B. Du Bois and Ida B. Wells; to leaders in the arts, sciences and sports — Elizabeth Catlett, Jackie Robinson, Gwendolyn Brooks, Charles Drew, Althea Gibson, Gordon Parks and Lorraine Hansberry, we have many people of African descent, past and present, to thank for making the United States a stronger and better nation.

The African-American poet June Jordan captured the spirit of determination for freedom and purpose in her "Poem for South African Women" in support of the freedom struggle of another people of African descent when she read it at the United Nations on 9 August 1978:

> "And who will join this standing up
>
> and the ones who stood without sweet company
>
> will sing and sing
>
> back into the mountains and
>
> if necessary
>
> even under the sea
>
> *we are the ones we have been waiting for*"

Our reflection on this day would be incomplete if we failed to recognize the modern manifestation of the horror of slavery in the trafficking of women, men and children. We must be ever-vigilant and continue to confront and combat this lasting plague on the world. At a remove of more than 200 years from the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, we must do more to share this terrible chapter in human history and obliterate its lasting impact. The United States is committed to doing its part and partnering with committed allies in commemorations such as today's and that of the International Decade for Persons of African Descent, in order to deepen awareness and understanding. We pay our respects to all who suffered, by building memorials such as the *Ark of Return* — and here I would like to recognize the great work of Ambassador Rattray and the nations of the Caribbean Community and of Africa in leading that effort — as well as monuments such as the soon-to-be-opened Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, all of them visible reminders of the past as well as inspiration for the future.

As we also join together today to celebrate the culture and heritage of the African diaspora and the diversity and strength that it brings to the fabric of our nations, let us renew our commitment to doing even more to end discrimination and exploitation and to create a more just and inclusive world.

Mr. Abdrakhmanov (Kazakhstan): At the outset, I would like to thank the President, Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, for convening today's commemorative meeting to mark the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. I would also like to thank Ms. Sheila Walker, Executive Director of Afrodiaspora, Inc., for her keynote address, and other speakers before me for their moving insights on the significance of this day.

We commend the United Nations for holding a number of commemorative activities around the world aimed at furthering understanding of the causes, consequences and lessons of the slave trade. Approximately 200 million people of African descent live in the Americas. Many millions more live in other parts of the world outside the African continent. It is important to celebrate the African legacy in order to further underline the major contribution that people of African descent have made to our societies and to promote their full inclusion. The vibrant culture and traditions of Africa have enriched life in the countries that were once involved in the slave trade, and the African diaspora continues to enhance many aspects of daily life in countries around the world. The Durban process raised the visibility of people of African descent and helped to bring about substantive advances in the promotion and protection of their rights as a result of concrete actions on the part of States, the

United Nations, other international and regional bodies and civil society.

But despite those advances, racism and racial discrimination, intolerance and xenophobia, direct and indirect, de facto and de jure, continue to manifest themselves around the world. I am confident that the fifteenth anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action represents an important opportunity for States to recommit to those principles and take concrete steps towards them through the adoption and effective implementation of national and international legal frameworks, policies and programmes aimed at combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

This International Day is a sober reminder that many modern forms of slavery and long-established stereotypes and biases continue to prevail, all of them calling for strong concerted multilateral action. We should remember such historical tragedies every day of our lives as we advance through the twenty-first century, in each thought, word and deed, and not merely at commemorative observances.

Kazakhstan's national legislation condemns and forbids forced labour, genocide, racial segregation and apartheid, as well as all forms of racial discrimination or propaganda and agitation based on notions of racial, national and religious superiority, whether perpetrated by institutions or citizens. My country's various ethnic groups are engaged in nation-building alongside ethnic Kazakhs, and enjoy full civil and social status, not as national minorities but as citizens with all civil and political rights. Our ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity represents our precious wealth. We have succeeded in turning our historical inheritance of a multi-confessional society into a strategic advantage. With Government support, we have achieved public awareness of the importance of tolerance and harmony as the cornerstones of Kazakh society in the various languages of our different ethnic groups through the power of mass and social media and modern digital technology. Kazakhstan supports the creation of inclusive multiracial organizations and movements. We have a unique constitutional authority, the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, for issues of inter-ethnic and cultural harmony. Our doctrine of national unity is aimed at strengthening mutual inter-ethnic respect.

Kazakhstan has contributed to the erection of the *Ark of Return* permanent memorial in honour of the victims of slavery, since we consider the transatlantic slave trade to be one of the most tragic pages of human history, and one that still has lasting and damaging consequences for human rights and international law. The erosion of international law demands that we all reaffirm its cornerstone principles and commit ourselves to their preservation in order to overcome the challenges ahead. During the general debate of the seventieth session of the General Assembly, the President of Kazakhstan proposed the convening of a United Nations conference at the highest level in 2016 with the aim of reaffirming the basic principles of international law.

Kazakhstan intends to continue to make every effort for the benefit of dialogue among civilizations and always stands ready to combat all forms and manifestations of slavery, racism and related intolerance at all levels and throughout the world, as well as to honour and celebrate the heritage and culture of the African diaspora.

Ms. Rodríguez Abascal (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Slavery and the transatlantic slave trade are among the most serious crimes against humanity not to have been adequately studied or to have their consequences on today's society duly recognized. Tragedy and unspeakable horror were the fate of the approximately 15 to 20 million men, women and children whom the transatlantic slave trade uprooted from their homes and sent to the Americas as commercial cargo. They were treated inhumanely, unjustly and despicably.

Cuba attaches particular importance, and is particularly sensitive to, the commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Cuba supported and co-sponsored resolution 61/19, which commemorated the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and designated the day we commemorate today.

As part of this cruel trade, approximately 1.3 million Africans were brought to the colonial plantations of Cuba. They were forcibly taken from their villages and families and sold as slave labour on the island. Freed slaves and their descendants have been major players in the various stages of the wars that enabled the Cuban people to exercise their self-determination.

Cuban identity was the result of a process of transculturation, with contributions from various ethnic groups in difficult environments — first colonial and then neocolonial. We are essentially a mixture of Hispanic and African. We also have influences from Asia and American indigenous peoples.

The Cuban people are extremely proud of their African roots, which are present in our character and our cultural manifestations. The Cuban culture and nationality emerged nourished by African heritage. Moreover, Cuba has also provided the sweat and blood of hundreds of thousands of its children to contribute to the emancipation of Africa, a continent to which all of humankind will eternally be indebted.

Much gold has been stained with the blood of the enslaved, much wealth produced from shame and indignity. The fate of the peoples of the third world was altered by exploitation on an immense scale, and it is those peoples who clearly deserve compensation for the horrendous crimes committed against their ancestors. The developed countries and their consumer societies, responsible for the accelerated and almost unstoppable destruction of the environment, have been the main beneficiaries of the conquest and colonization, slavery and transatlantic trade, the ruthless exploitation and extermination of hundreds of millions of children of the peoples of the South. They have become rich from the unjust economic order imposed on humankind and by the international financial institutions created exclusively by them and for them.

Cuba supports the request for compensation raised by the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Cuba also advocates the special and differential treatment required by developing countries. particularly in Africa, in their international economic relations. Cuba rejects the selfishness and the shameful opulence of the few, which serve as the models for ongoing globalization.

My country supports and co-sponsors the relevant draft resolution submitted each year by the member countries of CARICOM and the African Group. We recognize the importance of strengthening the activities of the United Nations and other international organizations such as UNESCO on this matter. That is the least the international community can do to repair the crime against humanity committed via the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans.

Mrs. Pobee (Ghana): I wish to begin by expressing my delegation's appreciation for the convening of this solemn commemorative meeting in observance of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. It is fitting that we remember that dark era in the history of humankind, during which millions of Africans — women, men and children — were taken as slaves from the continent and transported from their homelands to destinations in Europe and the Americas in inhuman conditions and treated as commodities. It is also right that we honour the victims of slavery and those who opposed and triumphed over this crime. Their strength of will and resilience continue to inspire us today.

Mere remembrance without positive action does not make for progress or renewal. Therefore, the commemoration of the end of slavery should serve as a time for deep reflection as well as collective resolve and action to address the false ideologies and racial prejudices that gave rise to this heinous crime, and which continue to manifest themselves in racism, racial discrimination and intolerance, modern forms of slavery and exploitation in our world today. We therefore commend the efforts of the United Nations system to educate current and future generations about the contemporary consequences of this tragedy of human history.

Many visitors to Ghana's Cape Coast and Elmina Castles, which bear haunting memories of the heinous crime of slavery, have the opportunity to see the Door of No Return, from which slaves were put onto ships bound for the Americas. Today, we are gratified that a visitor to the United Nations will also have the opportunity to see the permanent memorial, named the *Ark of Return*, which seeks to remind us of this tragedy and to call us to action. That memorial has special meaning for all peoples of African descent and for the African diaspora, especially as we build bridges to turn this historical aberration into positive bonds of cooperation and cultural and socioeconomic development for our peoples.

In conclusion, I wish to express our appreciation for this event. I trust that the international community can give true meaning and substance to this act of remembrance by working together with resolve and commitment to fight against racism and prejudice, guided by our firm belief in the dignity and equality of all human beings and in accordance with the universal ideals enshrined in the Charter of our Organization.

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil): Slavery and the slave trade victimized over 15 million people. Spanning over 400 years, the transatlantic slave trade was the largest and most inhuman forced migration in recorded history. It was not an isolated incident, but part of a man-made system that connected Europe, Africa, the Americas and Asia. It cannot be dissociated from colonialism, which was instrumental in the establishment of the unjust social, economic and institutional cornerstones needed for the transatlantic slave trade to thrive.

The scourge of the slave trade was intrinsically international in its making, but it was also international in its undoing. The late eighteenth-century movements in favour of fundamental freedoms inspired a global abolitionist movement that, within a span of 100 years, transformed slavery from norm to exception, from a tolerated lucrative activity to one of ignominy.

Brazil was at the centre of this unfortunate chapter of world history. The country received the largest number of enslaved Africans. Only after an estimated 4 million people were forcibly brought to Brazil from Africa over three centuries was slavery finally abolished. Today, Brazil is home to the largest number of persons of African descent outside of Africa, a population of more than 100 million people, according to the 2010 national census, representing approximately 50 per cent of the Brazilian population. People of African descent marked the emergence of contemporary Brazilian culture in many different ways, from economy to religion, from language to cuisine, from sports to literature. It is an essential part of our historic formation and our national identity. At the same time, people of African descent continue to be disproportionately affected by poverty, unemployment, violence, lack of quality education and health care.

Brazil takes great pride in the foundational, human and cultural contributions that African descendants brought to our nation. Today it is no longer acceptable to ignore the urgent need to address persistent social and economic inequities. A wide range of targeted public policies were established in the past decade. Affirmative action quotas were adopted in higher education and in the federal civil service, which is contributing to offering enhanced opportunity and has produced many successful role models. To redress the situation of young Brazilians of African descent, the Government designed a programme to reduce and prevent all forms of violence against African Brazilians, as well as to promote their social inclusion and empowerment. The emphasis of previous Brazilian Governments on tackling poverty and social exclusion has favoured Brazilians of African descent in particular. The Bolsa Família has reached the majority of Afro-Brazilians, and new legislation that protects the rights of domestic workers has translated into benefits for the majority of black women.

The recognition of the importance of African heritage in our very existence as a country has found expression in a number of concrete diplomatic actions. Brazil supported the International Decade for People of African Descent and its programme of activities, which we expect will contribute to the full implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and raise awareness with regard to combating prejudice, intolerance and racism. Brazil was also an early supporter of the initiative to erect, at a place of prominence at United Nations Headquarters, a permanent memorial in tribute to the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, and to strengthen our collective effort in the present to end racism.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in this commemorative meeting. The Assembly has thus concluded the commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to conclude the consideration of agenda item 118?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.

United Nations A/70/PV.90

General Assembly

Seventieth session

Official Records

90th plenary meeting
Friday, 1 April 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lykketoft ..... (Denmark)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 7 (*continued*)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

The Acting President: The Assembly is today to consider a report of the Fifth Committee submitted under sub-item (a), entitled "Appointment of members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions", of agenda item 114, entitled "Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments", as contained in document A/70/539/Add.1.

In order for the Assembly to consider the report of the Fifth Committee, it will be necessary to reopen the Assembly's consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 114.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to reopen its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 114 and proceed immediately to its consideration?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 114 (*continued*)

Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments

(a) Appointment of members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/70/539/Add.1)

The Acting President: In paragraph 3 of its report, the Fifth Committee recommends that the General Assembly appoint Ms. Carmel Power of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as a member of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for a term of office beginning on 16 May 2016 and ending on 31 December 2016.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to appoint Ms. Carmel Power as a member of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for a term of office beginning on 16 May 2016 and ending on 31 December 2016?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 114.

Reports of the Fifth Committee

The Acting President: The General Assembly will now consider the reports of the Fifth Committee on agenda items 131, 132, 134, 139, 140 and 146.

I request the Rapporteur of the Fifth Committee, Mr. Gert Auväärt of Estonia, to introduce in one intervention the reports of the Fifth Committee before the Assembly today.

Mr. Auväärt (Estonia), Rapporteur of the Fifth Committee: I have the honour today to present to the General Assembly the reports of the Administrative and Budgetary Committee containing recommendations on issues considered during the first part of the resumed seventieth session of the General Assembly.

The Fifth Committee met from 29 February to 24 March and held nine plenary meetings, as well as numerous rounds of informal and informal informal consultations. Considering the Committee's heavy schedule, it was particularly satisfying that it was able to finish its work on time.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-09154 (E)

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On agenda item 131, entitled "Financial reports and audited financial statements, and reports of the Board of Auditors", the Committee recommends to the General Assembly, in paragraph 7 of its report contained in document A/70/624/Add.1, the adoption of a draft resolution on the reports of the Board of Auditors on the strategic heritage plan of the United Nations Office at Geneva and on progress in the handling of information and communications technology affairs in the Secretariat, which the Committee adopted without a vote.

On agenda item 139, entitled "Human resources management", the Committee recommends to the General Assembly, in paragraph 6 of its report contained in document A/70/800, the adoption of a draft resolution on amendments to the Staff Regulations and Rules, which the Committee adopted without a vote.

On agenda item 140, entitled "Joint Inspection Unit", the Committee recommends to the General Assembly, in paragraph 6 of its report contained in document A/70/801, the adoption of a draft resolution, which the Committee adopted without a vote.

On agenda item 146, entitled "Financing of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals", the Committee recommends to the General Assembly, in paragraph 6 of its report contained in document A/70/634/Add.1, the adoption of a draft resolution on the construction of a new facility for the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, Arusha Branch, which the Committee adopted without a vote.

On agenda item 134, entitled "Programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017", the Committee recommends to the General Assembly, in paragraph 6 of its report contained in document A/70/648/Add.1, the adoption of a draft resolution entitled "Special subjects relating to the programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017", which the Committee adopted without a vote. The draft resolution covers issues of strengthening property management; the implementation of the organizational resilience management system; managing after-service health insurance liabilities; revised estimates relating to the programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017 for the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism; special political missions and the strategic capital review.

On agenda item 132, entitled "Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations", the Committee recommends to the General Assembly, in paragraph 8 of its report contained in document A/70/649/Add.1, the adoption of a draft resolution, entitled "Progress towards an accountability system in the United Nations Secretariat", which the Committee adopted without a vote.

In paragraph 9 of the same report, the Committee recommends to the Assembly the adoption of a draft decision, entitled "Questions deferred for future consideration", which the Committee adopted without a vote.

I wish to thank delegations for their cooperation and flexibility during the Fifth Committee's negotiations and to assure them that the actions taken during the Committee's 27th, 31st and 32nd formal meetings are reflected in the reports before the General Assembly. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to the Chair of the Fifth Committee, my fellow Bureau members and all the coordinators for their work. Last but not least, I thank the staff of the Fifth Committee secretariat for their commitment, and all the translators and interpreters for assisting us.

The Acting President: I thank the Rapporteur of the Fifth Committee.

If there is no proposal under rule 66 of the rules of procedure, I shall take it that the General Assembly decides not to discuss the reports of the Fifth Committee that are before it today.

It was so decided.

The Acting President: Statements will therefore be limited to explanations of vote. The positions of delegations regarding the recommendations of the Fifth Committee have been made clear in the Committee and are reflected in the relevant official records.

May I remind delegations that under paragraph 7 of decision 34/401, the General Assembly agreed that

> "When the same draft resolution is considered in a main committee and in a plenary meeting, a delegation should, as far as possible, explain its vote only once, that is, either in the Committee or in the plenary meeting, unless that delegation's vote in plenary meeting is different from its vote in the Committee."

May I furthermore remind delegations that, also in accordance with decision 34/401, explanations of

vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Before we begin to take action on the recommendations contained in the reports of the Fifth Committee, I should like to advise representatives that we are going to proceed to take decisions in the same manner as was done in the Fifth Committee, unless notified otherwise in advance. This means that where recorded votes were taken, we will do the same. I also hope that we will proceed to adopt without a vote those recommendations that were adopted without a vote in the Committee.

Agenda item 131 (*continued*)

Financial reports and audited financial statements, and reports of the Board of Auditors

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/70/624/Add.1)

The Acting President: The Assembly has before it a draft resolution recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 7 of its report.

We will now take a decision on the draft resolution. The Fifth Committee adopted it without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 70/238 B).

The Acting President: The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 131.

Agenda item 132 (*continued*)

Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/70/649/Add.1)

The Acting President: The Assembly has before it a draft resolution recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 8 of its report, as well as a draft decision recommended in paragraph 9 of the same report.

We will now take action on the draft resolution and on the draft decision, one by one.

The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft resolution, entitled "Progress towards an accountability system in the United Nations Secretariat". The Fifth Committee adopted it without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 70/255).

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take action on the draft decision, entitled "Questions deferred for future consideration". The Fifth Committee adopted it without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do likewise?

The draft decision was adopted (decision 70/553 B).

The Acting President: The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 132.

Agenda item 134 (*continued*)

Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/70/648/Add.1)

The Acting President: The Assembly has before it a draft resolution recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 6 of its report.

We will now take a decision on the draft resolution, entitled "Special subjects relating to the programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017". The Fifth Committee adopted it without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 70/248 B).

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, who wishes to speak in explanation of position on the resolution just adopted.

Mr. Awad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): We have already expressed our principled position on the text contained in the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/272) on the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism and have emphasized our commitment to providing humanitarian assistance to all those affected, without discrimination. We have also underlined our willingness to cooperate with United Nations agencies and the Organization's partners on a basis of respect for the guidelines for humanitarian assistance outlined in the provisions of resolution 46/182, foremost among them being respect for national sovereignty and the role of the countries concerned in overseeing the distribution of humanitarian assistance within their

territories, as well as for the principles of neutrality, integrity and non-politicization.

We stress the importance of delivering humanitarian assistance from within the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic, noting that we have already informed the Resident Coordinator of the new Mechanism for facilitating access for humanitarian aid convoys. We reiterate our reservations about some of the points in the Secretary-General's report, particularly with regard to the lack of accuracy of the figures it contains and the lack of positive cooperation on the part of the Mechanism with the Syrian Government. The Monitoring Mechanism has no mandate to deliver humanitarian aid to unstable areas within the country's territory. The issue comes under the purview of the Resident Coordinator, who should cooperate with the Syrian Government. We have expressed our position on this matter in various letters and statements on this humanitarian issue sent to the Secretariat.

My delegation has aligned itself with the consensus reached on the Assembly's adoption today of resolution 70/248 B, entitled "Special subjects relating to the programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017". However, we wish to express our reservations about section IV of the resolution, entitled "Revised estimates relating to the programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017 under sections 27, Humanitarian assistance, and 36, Staff assessment: United Nations Monitoring Mechanism".

The Acting President: The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 134.

Agenda item 139

Human resources management

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/70/800)

The Acting President: The Assembly has before it a draft resolution recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 6 of its report.

We will now take a decision on the draft resolution. The Fifth Committee adopted it without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do likewise?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 70/256).

The Acting President: The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 139.

Agenda item 140

Joint Inspection Unit

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/70/801)

The Acting President: The Assembly has before it a draft resolution recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 6 of its report.

We will now take a decision on the draft resolution. The Fifth Committee adopted it without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do likewise?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 70/257).

The Acting President: The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 140.

Agenda item 146 (*continued*)

Financing of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/70/634/Add.1)

The Acting President: The Assembly has before it a draft resolution entitled "Construction of a new facility for the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, Arusha branch" recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 6 of its report.

The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft resolution. The Fifth Committee adopted it without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do likewise?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 70/258).

The Acting President: The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 146.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I would like to thank His Excellency Mr. Durga Prasad Bhattarai, Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations and Chair of the Fifth Committee, the members of the Bureau, the Secretary of the Committee and representatives for a job well done.

The General Assembly has thus concluded its consideration of all the reports of the Fifth Committee before it for this meeting.

Agenda item 15 (*continued*)

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Draft resolution (A/70/L.42)

The Acting President: Members will recall that the Assembly considered agenda item 15 at its 75th and 82nd plenary meetings, on 14 December and 23 December 2015, respectively, and adopted resolution 70/110 under this item. Members will also recall that the Assembly considered, in a joint debate, agenda items 15, 116 and 123 at its 52nd plenary meeting, on 13 November 2015. Members will further recall that, under agenda items 15 and 116, the General Assembly adopted decision 70/539 at its 81st plenary meeting, on 22 December 2015.

I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil to introduce draft resolution A/70/L.42.

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil): It is an honour to address this plenary meeting to introduce draft resolution A/70/L.42, which proclaims 2016-2025 the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition.

Last year the world committed to ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture, which is Goal 2 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1). The task ahead is not simple. According to available data, nearly 800 million people worldwide remain chronically undernourished; 159 million children under 5 years of age are stunted; 50 million children under 5 years of age suffer from wasting; over 2 billion people suffer from micronutrient deficiencies, and a rapidly increasing number of people are affected by obesity in all regions of the world.

Today we still live with scenes of brutal starvation in conflict-affected areas, as well as with the chronic hunger that affects daily and silently poor populations in places free from conflict. This reality is even more unacceptable when we understand that the planet produces enough food to feed all humankind. Clearly, not enough is being done to ensure the right to food. This is what draft resolution A/70/L.42 is about, and this is why it has gained such broad support from Member States, including a large number of sponsors from various regions.

As requested by the 2014 Rome Declaration on Nutrition, we will now have a platform within the United Nations to build synergy among all ongoing initiatives to end hunger and malnutrition, to give visibility to the problem and to engage everyone in finding solutions. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) will coordinate the implementation of the Decade in collaboration with the World Food Programme, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the United Nations Children's Fund. But the decade should not be seen as a United Nations process only. In order to ensure food security and proper nutrition for all, we need to bring together Member States, civil society, the private sector, academia and the media. We need a collective engagement towards this coming endeavour.

It is time to tackle the root causes of hunger and malnutrition, which are, to a large degree, a consequence of poverty and inequality. We need to invest in small-scale food producers to reduce trade distortions, build sustainable food systems, pursue sustainable consumption and production patterns, and reduce food loss and waste.

Brazil is deeply committed to ensuring food security and nutrition, both domestically and through international cooperation, in particular South-South and triangular cooperation. In the past few years, my country has made important strides in increasing access to income and food, as well as in fighting extreme poverty. The right to adequate food was affirmed as a constitutional right in 2010, and we are proud to no longer figure on FAO's hunger map. This achievement is the result of a systematic investment in cash transfers, public-sector food procurement and social mobilization, and requires constant attention to be sustained and deepened.

We look forward to engaging in the implementation of the Decade, sharing information on our national policies and learning from other countries' experiences. A great Brazilian statesman and intellectual, Josué de Castro, once said that hunger and war do not follow any natural law; they are rather human creations. The United Nations Decade on Action on Nutrition has been designed to raise awareness and to enlist political

support for the fight against hunger at all levels. I thank Member States who participated in the negotiations of this draft resolution, as well as FAO and WHO for their technical support along the process.

The Acting President: I thank the representative of Brazil. We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/70/L.42.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/70/L.42, entitled "United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025)". I now give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Botnaru (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): I should like to announce that, since the submission of the draft resolution, and in addition to those delegations listed in the draft document, the following countries have also become sponsors of draft resolution A/70/L.42: Cameroon, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Slovenia, Thailand and Turkey.

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to adopt draft resolution A/70/L.42?

Draft resolution A/70/L.42 was adopted (resolution 70/259).

The Acting President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 15.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.

United Nations A/70/PV.91

General Assembly
Seventieth session

Official Records

91st plenary meeting
Friday, 15 April 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lykketoft ..... (Denmark)

The meeting was called to order at 10:10 a.m.

Agenda item 113 (*continued*)

Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections

(b) Election of thirty members of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law

The President: Members will recall that, at its 50th plenary meeting, on 9 November 2015, the General Assembly elected the following 23 States as members of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law for a six-year term of office beginning on 27 June 2016: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, the Czech Republic, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Mauritius, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, Spain, Thailand, Turkey, the United States of America and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Therefore, those 23 States are not eligible for election.

Members will also recall that there remain six seats to be filled from among the Group of African States and one seat from the Asia-Pacific States.

I should like to remind members that, as of 27 June 2016, the following States will continue to be represented on the Commission: Armenia, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Denmark, Ecuador, El Salvador, France, Germany, Greece, Honduras, Hungary, Indonesia, Japan, Kuwait, Liberia, Malaysia, Mauritania, Mexico, Namibia, Panama, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Zambia. Therefore, those 30 States are not eligible for election.

The General Assembly will now proceed to the election of five members to replace those members whose terms of office will expire on 26 June 2016.

In accordance with rule 92 of the rules of procedure, the election shall be held by secret ballot and there shall be no nominations. However, I should like to recall paragraph 16 of decision 34/401, whereby the practice of dispensing with the secret ballot for elections to subsidiary organs when the number of candidates corresponds to the number of seats to be filled should become standard unless a delegation specifically requests a vote on a given election.

In the absence of such a request, may I take it that the Assembly decides to proceed to this election on the basis of dispensing with the secret ballot?

It was so decided.

The President: With regard to candidatures, I should like to inform members that, for the six seats from among the Group of African States, the Group has endorsed Kenya, Lesotho, Libya, Nigeria and Uganda.

Since the number of candidates for the group is equal to or less than the number of seats to be filled by the Group, may I take it that the General Assembly wishes to declare Kenya, Lesotho, Libya, Nigeria and Uganda elected for a six-year term of office beginning on 27 June 2016?

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-10629 (E)

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It was so decided.

The President: I congratulate Kenya, Lesotho, Libya, Nigeria and Uganda, which have been elected members of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law.

With regard to the one remaining vacancy from among the Group of African States and the one remaining vacancy from the Group of Asia-Pacific States, the General Assembly will hold elections upon notification by interested Member States from those two regions.

The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (b) of agenda item 113.

Agenda item 13 (*continued*)

Improving global road safety

Note by the Secretary-General (A/70/386)

Draft resolution (A/70/L.44)

The President: I should now like to consult with Member States with a view to giving the floor to Mr. Jean Todt, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Road Safety. If there is no objection, may I take it that the General Assembly wishes, without setting a precedent, to invite Mr. Todt to make a statement at this meeting?

It was so decided.

The President: In accordance with the decision just taken, I now give the floor to Mr. Todt.

Mr. Todt (*spoke in French*): I acknowledge the important honour conferred upon me to address the General Assembly at its seventieth session in my capacity as the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Road Safety. It is therefore my duty and responsibility to raise a certain number of alarming and disturbing issues here in the Hall, because they force all of us to question ourselves. Those questions relate to the cause for which, alongside others, I have been waging a fierce battle for many years now. I am speaking about the fight against the dangers of the road or, diplomatically speaking, the fight for road safety.

First, why and how can we speak about this silent killer? It is such a terrible scourge that we generally prefer to speak of it as seldom as possible. I might recall the terrifying statistics — unfortunately, well-known ones that are mentioned in draft resolution A/70/L.44, to be introduced shortly by the representative of the Russian Federation, who should be commended. However, as time is short, I shall limit myself, during the five minutes allotted to me, that 12 people are killed on roads every five minutes, 480 will suffer injuries of varying severity, and two children will die. We accordingly ask why is there silence. I do not really have an answer.

There is of course no hierarchy or ranking of catastrophes and their victims, and no one can or should keep such a macabre tally. I will therefore not attempt to do so. However, how can we avoid asking ourselves why that double standard exists? Why is there such resignation? Why is there such fatalism, for which we are all responsible? Would our awareness be greater if, instead of speaking in years, I were to speak in decades? In so we would need to say that every 10 years there are 13 million deaths on the roads, half a billion people injured and approximately 2 million children killed. Furthermore, those statistics do not take into account the growth and increasing mobility of the population.

What better forum exists than the General Assembly in which to speak out and to remember that road safety is also a problem of solidarity and development and one that urbanization and motorization — which will be addressed at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in Quito — will only increase and worsen if we do not act. The disparities among countries are also striking. The less advanced and the middle-income countries, with 82 per cent of the global population and 54 per cent of licenced vehicles, account for 90 per cent of fatalities on the roads, while the others, the high-income countries, with 18 per cent of the population and 46 per cent of vehicles, account for 10 per cent of the fatalities. I give yet one last statistic: the cost of road accidents and their consequences is estimated at approximately $500 billion per year. It does not take much imagination to consider what such an enormous sum of money could be used for.

How can we then accept that the sums allocated to fighting this global scourge and veritable killer are so miserly and so small as to be almost ridiculous? In fact, I am talking about only a few tens of millions of dollars. That is right; everyone heard correctly: only a few tens of millions of dollars. And that is when campaigns against other global scourges — and I am genuinely happy for them — have several tens of billions of dollars at their disposal to fight those scourges. One

again, one must wonder why there is such a difference and why there is such a gap?

The draft resolution that will soon be introuced will — I hope — enable concrete advances to be made, because nothing decisive or effective can be undertaken without substantial financial resources. Accordingly, I would like to stress the importance of paragraph 20 of the draft resolution and the progress that could result from it. It will therefore be one of the priorities of my efforts during the second year of my tenure as Special Envoy to try to bring about the establishment and financing of the United Nations global fund for road safety called for by the draft resolution.

There is another question that I would like to ask. While the United Nations and its specialized agencies are mobilizing and 58 conventions have already been drawn up within the framework of the United Nations, why, in a certain number of countries, are vehicles that do not observe basic safety standards still being built? What is even more worrying is that those vehicles are built in the same factories, often on a neighbouring assembly line under the same roof, as those that strictly adhere to safety standards, because those cars are being built for export. What accounts for those deliberate disparities? The list of reasons could go on. The same issues apply to road construction — compliance with the laws, security standards and the installation of road signs and so on.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing the importance of road safety education. In the third millennium we need to have every child learn not only to write, read and count, but also to move around as a pedestrian, motorcyclist, motorbiker and future driver. That is a major goal, but one so easy to achieve. Imagine just one hour a week dedicated to education on mobility. That would mark significant progress. How many victims would be spared if we did so? In the General Assembly we must recall that in 1948 the Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 3 of which stipulates that

> "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

The right to life is what is referred to above all, hence this is what we are fighting for. Let us not forget, at least for those millions of people who are casualties of road accidents.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation to introduce draft resolution A/70/L.44.

Mr. Kononuchenko (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Improving road safety is a priority for most countries in the world. During the years of the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020, significant results have been made in reducing the number of traffic accidents. The inclusion of this topic in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1) offers us a possibility to consider this issue not just in terms of the loss of human life, but also as an element of sustainable development in all its three dimensions, namely, economic, social and environmental.

We are greatly honoured to introduce draft resolution A/70/L.44, entitled "Improving global road safety." Based on the relevance of the provisions of the resolutions of previous years, draft resolution A/70/L.44 reflects new elements of the long-term strategy in the field of road safety, including the appointment of a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Road Safety and the adoption of the Brasilia Declaration on Road Safety at the second Global High-Level Conference on Road Safety, and also notes key milestones for further efforts to mitigate the negative consequences of road traffic accidents. I will mention just the most important of those.

First, the draft resolution calls for developing and strengthening partnerships with the participation of States and international organizations, including the agencies of the United Nations system, civil society and the private sector, in order to improve the situation on roads. As one of the mechanisms that will facilitate the pooling and coordination of efforts, draft resolution A/70/L.44 and takes note of such a consultative mechanism as the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration.

Secondly, the draft resolution aims at the creation of a road safety trust fund that could be an additional instrument of financial support and a catalyst for attracting investments for the implementation of road safety programmes.

Thirdly, the draft resolution invites the relevant organizations, including the World Health Organization and the regional economic commissions, first and foremost the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, to provide further assistance to interested States on improving the normative legal framework

and road safety technical standards, as well as on the development of further targeted indicators of the major risk factors in that sphere.

The inclusion in the draft resolution of the following references is also significant: the upcoming third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, the World Health Organization Global Conference on Health Promotion and events as part of the fourth United Nations Global Road Safety Week.

Given that the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is dedicated to the theme of no one being left behind, it was important to focus on the most vulnerable groups in the field of ensuring road safety, namely, children and persons with disabilities.

We note that the negotiations took place in a constructive manner and with the participation of all stakeholders. Allow us to express our gratitude to delegations for their active participation in the agreement. In particular, I would like to single out our colleagues from the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations for their valuable contribution. We call on all Member States to support draft resolution A/70/L.44 and invite them to become co-sponsors.

The President: I now call on the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Parenti (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States.

The EU and its member States welcome draft resolution A/70/L.44, entitled "Improving global road safety." In particular, we would like to thank the Russian Federation for its leadership and efforts to facilitate this outcome.

In 2015 in Europe 26,000 people died on the roads, the equivalent of a middle-sized town. Worldwide, road-traffic deaths accounted for more than 1.2 million persons, which would compare to the population of the ninth most-populated city of the United States. Fifty million people a year are injured because of road traffic crashes. Road traffic crashes are a leading cause of death globally and are the main cause of death among people aged between 15 and 29 years. That is unacceptable, and shows that our road transport systems around the world are inherently unsafe and that one single human mistake can end up in a catastrophe for individuals, families and societies.

Europe has taken a clear stand on this major health problem. According to our white paper on transport, by 2050 Europe is to move close to zero fatalities in road transport — a clear vision that will not be achieved overnight. A system of intermediate targets and safety indicators is needed in order to guide our efforts along the way. Based on that, we agreed on the Sustainable Development Goals in September 2015 and its target 3.6, which is to halve the global number of deaths and injuries from road traffic crashes by 2020. In that context, the Brasilia Declaration on Road Safety, adopted at the second Global High-level Conference on Road Safety, held in November 2015, and draft resolution A/70/L.44, entitled "Improving global road safety", represent clear and recent illustrations of the continuous international efforts to achieve our difficult goals.

To prevent road traffic injuries and to develop a safe road transport system, we need a comprehensive and holistic approach with the involvement of all stakeholders. The EU road safety policy framework 2011-2020, which is guiding our efforts towards contributing to safer roads, is a good example. The framework focuses on new key priorities, such as reducing accidents on rural roads and on vulnerable road users, such as pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, children and elderly people. In addition, we built on previous commitments including, among others, strengthening controls and penalties; supporting initiatives at the national level to combat driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol; investing in road infrastructure and improving traffic conditions; and improving legislation on driving licences and standards of fitness for driving. Such measures resulted in reducing road fatalities by 17 per cent between 2011 and 2015.

But even if the regional road fatality rate in the EU is the lowest worldwide, it remains unacceptable. We need to continue to share best practices and exchange information at the national, regional and global levels, with the active participation of civil society and the private sector. We also need to strengthen our efforts to integrate safety into the broader agenda of sustainable cities and transport. We know the main killers on the roads: speeding, drunk-driving and the failure to wear a seat belt. To make roads safer, work is needed on safer road infrastructure, on safer vehicles and on safer road users. That includes the implementation and enforcement of adequate laws, but also soft measures such as awareness-raising and educational efforts.

Although road traffic injuries are a major public-health problem and the challenges sometimes feel overwhelming, there is hope. Many countries around the world have already shown that it is possible, through a holistic and multisectoral approach, to prevent people from getting killed or seriously injured in road traffic. Let us build on those experiences. We cannot afford to be complacent about road safety; millions of human lives are at stake.

Mr. Ba Omar (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): I deliver this statement on behalf of the Permanent Representative of Oman, who unfortunately was unable to be with us.

On behalf of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report (A/70/386) on the efforts made to improve safety on roads worldwide. The report provides information on the latest actions by States to implement the recommendations of General Assembly resolutions relating to improving road safety. I would also like to commend the constructive efforts by the international community in that area.

Oman was a pioneer in launching the campaign on road safety at the international level. Oman proposed inscribing the item on road safety on the Organization's agenda for the sake of future generations. After the General Assembly first included the issue of road safety on its agenda, on 23 May 2003 the Assembly adopted resolution 57/309, which the Sultanate of Oman had introduced based on our belief in the importance of road safety worldwide. Having highlighted the tragedy of unnecessary deaths and accidents due to inadequate road safety precautions, the General Assembly subsequently adopted several other resolutions on road safety. A number of ministerial-level meetings were held in order to draw attention to the deaths resulting from traffic accidents, to encourage the building of safer roads and to offer technical support for safety on roads at the regional and international levels.

Since road safety is now one of the important items on the United Nations agenda and on those of other organizations, the international community has been giving the utmost priority to working with the various stakeholders to reduce the negative impact of the lack of road safety. Approximately 1 million people are killed annually, and nearly 50 million severely injured, due to traffic accidents on the world's roads — creating great pressure on the international community.

The Government of Oman has been making great efforts to improve road safety. We have issued a decree to establish the National Committee for Road Safety, aimed at elaborating a comprehensive strategy to reduce traffic accidents, deal with their negative impact and take into account related problems. The strategy will set the foundation to respect international standards in building safe roads. As for awareness efforts, we have worked to improve reporting statistics on a weekly basis. We are also collaborating with the mass media and issuing more than 100 awareness newsletters each year, distributing them to distant regions in the Sultanate, targeting university and other students and the community at large. We are launching documentaries to raise awareness about the importance of road safety. Some of those films have received international awards. In order to introduce new generations to road safety, we have established a traffic school for children, which is actually a comprehensive mini-city that introduces pupils to road-safety standards and laws. We are also training police officers and the various road users on road safety. In addition, at the beginning of April, the Oman Liquefied Natural Gas Company launched a project entitled a Gift to the Nation, which aims to reduce road accidents by setting up a traffic safety institute in Sur province.

The efforts made by my Government and our private sector and the improved awareness in our society have made it possible for Oman to achieve positive results in reducing accidents on our roads. Statistics indicate that the number of deaths on our roads have decreased by 50 per cent, and injuries by 30 per cent, since 2012, in spite of a 25 per cent increase in the number of registered vehicles on our roads.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our appreciation to you, Mr. President, and to the Secretary-General. We assure the General Assembly that we are committed to improving international efforts to achieve greater safety on roads and to work together to achieve our common goal.

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil): I commend the Russian Federation for introducing the draft resolution on road safety and for facilitating the negotiations over the past few weeks. I would also like to thank the Sultanate of Oman and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Jean Todt, for their leadership. And I welcome the report of the Secretary-General.

In November, Brazil had the honour to host the second Global High-level Conference on Road Safety. The Conference, co-sponsored by the World Health Organization with the support of many other players, including the Economic Commission for Europe and other United Nations regional commissions, welcomed to Brasilia 2,200 participants in a truly multi-stakeholder fashion. The outcome document of the Conference, the Brasilia Declaration on Road Safety, was drafted through an inclusive negotiation process and is expected to be endorsed by the General Assembly today. In doing so, the United Nations will align its guidelines and actions on road safety with a transformative paradigm of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1).

Among other things, road safety is a question of development, equality and sustainability and of how we interact in the public sphere with our common and shared space. It relates to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 very directly — which is to ensure healthy lives and to promote well-being for all at all ages — but also with SDG 11, which reminds us to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Sustainable public-transport policies should be at the core of road safety concerns. Most of the victims are in developing countries; more than half of them are not automobile users. They are pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and, more broadly, the still-uncertain number of people who use unsafe transportation systems. Vulnerable populations such as women, children and persons with disabilities should receive special attention in this regard.

I would like to highlight the importance of the mandate to be given by the General Assembly to the World Health Organization to work with Member States on global voluntary targets for key risk factors such as drinking and driving, speeding and failing to use motorcycle helmets, seat belts and child restraints, as well as for service-delivery mechanisms. This work is instrumental to achieving the ambitious SDG targets for road safety. International cooperation, including capacity-building and technology transfer, is crucial to our endeavour. Brazil will be following attentively the discussions coordinated by the Secretary-General on the establishment of a fund for road safety.

Draft resolution A/70/L.44 will send a strong political message that we hope will be echoed at the World Health Assembly next May in Geneva and at the third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, to be held in October in Quito. Together, those processes provide the mandates and sense of urgency needed to achieve the ambitious targets of the Decade of Action for Road Safety and of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I would also like to thank Ambassador Churkin for his personal leadership on this issue and for the steady, determined commitment of the Russian Federation to shine a spotlight on this serious problem, and to urge all nations to help solve it. The United States is proud to co-sponsor the critically important draft resolution A/70/L.44. We urge every Member State not only to adopt it, but to translate its commitments into practice through concrete public policy efforts.

Road crashes kill roughly 1.2 million people every year. Pause and think about that — approximately 1,200,000 individuals killed every single year. That is more people than are citizens of 40 States Members of the United Nations — year after year — for reasons both predictable and preventable.

Those losses are not equally distributed around the globe. Low- and middle-income nations are particularly hard-hit. Although home to just over half of the world's vehicles, those nations account for 90 per cent of all traffic deaths. It is for good reason that the Sustainable Development Goals include a specific target for global road safety among the health goals.

Perhaps even more shocking is the people who are disproportionately affected. Road deaths are by far the leading cause of death for young people ages 15 to 29 around the world. The General Assembly regularly debates serious threats to human life; this issue clearly must be treated as one of them. And the cost is not only felt in lives lost, but in the consequences for development. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that an estimated 3 per cent of global gross domestic product is lost to road traffic deaths and injuries.

As we pass the halfway point of the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020, we can point to some progress. The number of annual deaths has remained roughly consistent since 2007, even as the world's population continues to increase by around 1.1 per cent every year, which currently amounts to an increase of around 80 million people per year. Since 2010, 79 countries have seen a decrease in the number of road deaths. But at the same time, 68 other nations have seen

a rise in road deaths. No one should feel satisfied with the progress. We have to do better.

What more can we do? Many of the deaths can be prevented by improvements in legislation, road design, traffic management, safety equipment, emergency response and human behaviour. Simply using a seat belt reduces serious and fatal injuries by 40 to 65 per cent. Drivers, in particular those who drive drunk, drugged, drowsy or distracted, are a central part of this problem. The threat of distraction is particularly urgent, because in virtually every one of our countries there simply is not sufficient recognition of the dangers of driving while texting, calling or otherwise not paying full attention on the road.

Consider this: the average time a driver takes his or her eyes off the road while texting is five seconds. If the driver is driving 55 miles an hour for five seconds — or roughly 89 kilometres per hour — and is looking at his or her phone, he or she will cover roughly the length of an entire soccer field in that five seconds effectively blind. If we think about how reckless it would be to close one's eyes for five seconds at a time while driving, we start to get a sense for how dangerous it is to text at the wheel.

A 2014 study found that at any given moment during the day in the United States, more than 587,000 vehicles were being driven by someone who was using a cell phone at the same time. The results are predictably deadly. That same year, 3,179 people in this country were killed, and 431,000 others were injured, in collisions involving distracted drivers. At least one in 10 fatal crashes in this country — and nearly one in five injury crashes — involve a distracted driver.

As Governments and societies, we are beginning to wake up to the gravity of the threat. According to WHO, 139 countries have approved laws that prohibit the use of handheld phones while driving. Here in the United States we have convened two national distracted-driving summits, banned texting and cell-phone use for commercial drivers, encouraged States to adopt tough laws and launched multiple campaigns to raise public awareness about the dangers and human costs of distracted driving. We have designated this month, April, as national Distracted Driving Awareness Month, and have launched a new public-awareness campaign and law-enforcement crackdown. Still, given the numbers and the tragedies, we can and must do more.

Here is one lesson we have learned: the most compelling advocates in convincing people of the dangers of distracted driving are often the victims. I would like to conclude by telling the Assembly the quick story of one of those individuals.

In 2008, Jacy Good was driving home to Lancaster, Pennsylvania with her parents from her college graduation ceremony when their car was struck head-on by a tractor trailer. Both of Jacy's parents were killed, and she suffered critical injuries. Doctors gave her a 10 per cent chance of making it through the first night. The accident was caused by a distracted driver talking on his cell phone.

But Jacy somehow beat the odds and survived, and while the event left her partially paralysed and with minor lingering cognitive issues, it has also made her into a powerful advocate for educating people about the dangers of distracted driving and the need to adopt reforms to address this deadly problem. Since 2011, when she and her husband, Steve, founded an organization dedicated to this issue — an organization called HangUpAndDrive.com — Jacy has spoken at nearly 600 events in 32 States.

Texting while driving is a global killer, one that disproportionately affects our young people. We must do a better job of treating it that way. If we do, and if we bring the energy, innovation and commitment that we see in partners like Jacy Good, we can save millions of lives.

Lord Robertson (United Kingdom): It is a great honour for me once again to represent the United Kingdom in the General Assembly at this meeting on global road safety. I would like to thank the Government of the United Kingdom for giving me, an opposition politician, the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the Government.

Last September, in this Hall, the Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by the world's Governments. For the very first time, global goals such as these included a road safety target, a clear and unambiguous target to halve road-traffic fatalities by 2020. In Brazil, last November, many of us gathered at the high-level conference on road safety to set the agenda for delivering on this global target and to adopt the Brasilia Declaration. More than 70 ministers and 2,000 representatives participated in the Conference. Speaking at the closing ceremony, I described the Declaration as a manifesto for change, and it is a

great pleasure to see so much of the change that was proposed in Brasilia included in the draft resolution we will formally adopt here today.

The draft resolution urges all Governments to display leadership and cooperation and calls on donors to support a new global fund. It issues a clear moral challenge to all the world's car makers to meet essential and inarguable minimum United Nations safety standards by 2020. It highlights the appalling toll of child and adolescent casualties and calls on countries to meet their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, established to protect our young. It recognizes the need to design and manage highways and city streets to be safe for all, makes the vital link between safe mobility and environmental protection and demonstrates why road safety must be at the heart of the new urban agenda to be agreed on later this year at the third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development.

This is a draft resolution that can help us to deliver change. But we will succeed only if we resolve together to turn the words on its pages into action on our streets. And we must act now because, as Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron has said,

> "Every six seconds, someone is killed or seriously injured on the world's roads. Addressing this must be an urgent priority for the international community."

The United Kingdom is responding to the Sustainable Development Goals. In December, the Government published a new road-safety policy statement, adopting a safe-system approach and setting out how it will deliver an election manifesto commitment to reducing road traffic deaths every year. The United Kingdom's policy statement references the United Nations Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020 as an organizing framework. It sets out a clear plan for driving down casualties, through measures that include the protection of vulnerable road users; tough enforcement of speeding and drunken driving; and encouraging a faster uptake of safer vehicles. In order to improve infrastructure safety, the Highways England organization is now aiming for zero, with the goal of ensuring that by 2020, 90 per cent of travel on its strategic network will be on roads with a safety assessment of three or more stars. In solidarity with the global effort, the United Kingdom Department for International Development is funding the World Bank's Global Road Safety Facility, helping to catalyse a local response in low-income countries with high levels of road traffic carnage.

I am very proud that the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile Foundation, the independent United Kingdom charity that I chair, is at the forefront of campaigning and collaborative funding to tackle the global epidemic of road death and injury. Our Foundation has helped to establish and finance two other United Kingdom charities, the International Road Assessment Programme and the Global New Car Assessment Programme, which are now working with dozens of countries across the world to improve infrastructure and vehicle safety. We are providing strong support to the United Nations Special Envoy for Road Safety, Mr. Jean Todt, who spoke earlier, and to his high-level efforts to secure unprecedented financing for road safety. And we are excited about working with UNICEF and other global and national partners on a new child-health initiative with the aim of achieving the vision that every child can enjoy a safe and healthy journey to school.

We are doing this because if we are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, we must be ambitious, and we have to succeed. We must succeed for Lavna, a 14-year-old girl killed by a lorry as she walked to school in London on the same day that we met in Brasilia. We must succeed for Sammy, struck down and killed at the age of 13 while walking to school here in New York City. And we must succeed for Maria, an 11-year-old girl from Brazil who wrote a prizewinning essay for a school road-safety competition. In her essay, Maria said,

> "You should have love for life, your life and others' as well. I believe that if all drivers thought this way then certainly many children would still have their parents and many parents would still have their children."

Just 10 months after she wrote those words, Maria and her father were killed when their motorbike was hit by a car.

We can therefore resolve here today that the loss of those young lives will mean something. We can resolve here today that there will be no more excuses or delays for delivering the solutions that we know can work and prevent more unnecessary deaths. We now have the new Sustainable Development Goals, which include the very ambitious target of halving road casualties in the

next five years. So many lives are at stake. We cannot afford to fail. So let us approve today's draft resolution and then work together to deliver the change that the world so desperately needs.

Mr. Belin (Sweden): Sweden aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union.

Sweden welcomes the General Assembly's forthcoming adoption by consensus of draft resolution A/70/L.44, entitled "Improving global road safety", and we would like to thank the Russian Federation for its leadership and efforts to facilitate it.

Road traffic injuries are a global public health problem that needs the global attention of which today's draft resolution is an expression. Fifty years ago, Sweden's traffic casualties peaked at around 17 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants; since then, that number has fallen to less than three per 100,000. That trend is one of the reasons why a country like Sweden has adopted Vision Zero and can seriously consider the possibility of developing a safe system for all road users.

To get where we are now has been a long and winding journey and our knowledge and competence have grown along the way. One important thing we have learned from experience is that systematic and effective road-safety work must be holistic. We have to work on all the aspects of the system, such as road infrastructure, the urban environment, speed limits and vehicle design, together with aspects of the system's use, such as speeding, drinking and driving, and wearing seat belts and helmets. Another thing we have learned is that road safety is complex and multisectoral. We need to involve various stakeholders at the international, regional, national and local levels, such as Governments, the private sector, municipalities and non-governmental organizations, because all of them influence different aspects of the road transport system.

In order to develop every part of the road system and to get all stakeholders to work for the same goals, we need both a long-term vision of a safe system and short-term targets and indicators for managing progress. Based on its experience with this, Sweden fully supports target 3.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals, but we would also like to highlight target 11.2 and its impact on road safety. Road traffic injuries are one important aspect of sustainability. People need to walk, ride bikes, drive and commute by public transport. That should never be associated with the risk of being killed or seriously injured.

The progress Sweden has made in road safety would not have been possible without help from the international community. We therefore welcome the upcoming adoption of draft resolution A/70/L.44 and further international collaboration in this field.

Mr. Roet (Israel): I almost did not make it here today. As I was driving to this meeting in the terrible New York traffic, almost in a rage, I remembered what I was coming here to do and how calm we have to be on the road.

At the outset, let me thank the World Health Organization for its leadership role on this life-saving issue and the Russian Federation for leading the negotiations on draft resolution A/70/L.44.

Israel has long been committed to promoting road safety. That is why we speak at this meeting every year. This issue has been, and still is, one of our national priorities.

The year 2015 was a landmark year for development. Member States reached historic agreements, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1) and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. Today, in 2016, we will begin implementing the commitments we made to future generations. When it comes to road safety, the 2030 Agenda has set the ambitious goals of halving the global number of deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents by 2020 and providing access to safe, affordable and sustainable transport systems for all by 2030.

The challenges before us are daunting. Road transportation is at the heart of our societies and is the lifeblood of our economies. Yet every year 1.25 million people die, 50 million are injured in road-related incidents and many suffer long-term or permanent disabilities. Those accidents are tragedies for the victims and their families, but they also have serious socioeconomic consequences. That is especially true for low-income countries, where 90 per cent of the world's fatalities on the road occur, despite having only 50 per cent of the world's vehicles.

Crashes deprive families of their primary breadwinners or force them to contend with expensive medical care. When that happens, families are plunged into a crippling cycle of poverty. According to the World Bank, road crashes cost the Governments of

developing countries an estimated 1 to 5 per cent of their gross domestic products. Therefore, by saving lives on the road we are also fighting poverty and boosting prosperity.

The Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety provides clarity and areas of focus for national authorities seeking to improve domestic road safety. That will help to stabilize, and ultimately reduce, the forecasted level of global road fatalities. Progress has already been made. In that regard, it is worth mentioning the increasing activities of regional organizations, such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, to improve road safety among their members.

Mr. Cardi (Italy), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Israel has discovered that even seemingly simple actions can make a difference. Our Government has been working to change the driving culture in Israel through marketing strategies and campaigns, including by displaying billboards that read "Think Life!". A previous campaign reminded us that, on the road, we do not always have to prove that we are right, but instead we should choose to act wisely. Israel's National Road Safety Authority promotes regulations and policies, prepares driver education programmes and has a close working relationship with other branches of Government, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dedicated to road safety.

Those actions enable us to reach out to all sectors of society, including those sectors that historically have a higher rate of traffic incidents than the general population. The National Road Safety Authority also encourages the development of intelligent transportation systems. Through the integration of computers and information technologies into vehicles and infrastructure, intelligent transportation systems enable transportation authorities, transport providers and private road users to make better informed, safer and more intelligent decisions. The result is significantly enhanced efficiency of the use of resources and time, which contributes to protecting the environment. One example of such lifesaving technologies has been developed by the Israeli company Mobileye. This innovative company has created a vision-based advanced system that provides warnings for collision prevention and mitigation. Those are a few of the steps we in Israel have taken on the path towards road safety, but we will continue to pursue policies and encourage innovation to keep making our roads safer.

Road traffic deaths and injuries are preventable. The efforts of Governments, NGOs and the private sector will help to ensure that we meet the goals set forth in the Decade of Action and the road safety-related targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Together, we can make roads safer and our people more secure. The Jewish tradition teaches us that whenever someone saves one life, it is as if he saved the entire world. Let us unite to save the world one life at a time.

Mr. Lamek (France) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of France, I would like to thank the President for having convened this meeting, as well as to commend the Russian delegation for having prepared and facilitated the negotiations on draft resolution A/70/L.44, to be adopted by the General Assembly today. I also wish to commend the work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Jean Todt, and to thank him for his commitment to road safety.

We align ourselves with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and its member States.

With more than two deaths and 100 injuries per second worldwide due to road accidents, many involving children and young people, it is urgent to act and implement the 10 basic steps recommended by the World Health Organization in order to halve the number of deaths and injuries on the roads by 2020, as we collectively committed ourselves to doing here in the Hall in September 2015 (see A/70/PV.4).

Since the launch of the Decade of Action for Road Safety, the relatively stable statistics on global population growth and on the number of vehicles is a source of hope. Lives have been saved, in particular with the adoption by 17 additional countries of laws mitigating the risk factors for road accidents, including bans on drunk driving and laws requiring the wearing of helmets. We must continue along that path.

For France, leaving no one behind is an important initiative to save 2,000 additional lives on the roads. The past indicates that such a result is within our reach. Over the course of the decade from 2001 to 2010, France went from more than 8,000 killed in 2001 to fewer than 4,000 in 2010, and in 2014 the number was 3,384. We could not have achieved that result if political will at the highest level had not been put forth in 2002.

That commitment has paid off and has not wavered in recent years.

A close monitoring of statistics should enable us to adapt our actions. In response to the uptick in fatalities from 2014 to 2015, the French Government implemented an emergency plan of 26 measures, including combating the dangers of using telephones while driving; drinking and driving for young drivers; and speeding, through the use of a new type of independent radars that provides better results.

Leaving no one behind also means tackling this scourge in areas where road accidents represent a disproportionate burden. Developing countries suffer approximately 90 per cent of deaths in the world, while road traffic deaths in Africa are three times greater than in Europe. Hence, since 2009, France has been firmly committed to the implementation of the Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety, as illustrated by the commemoration, each year since 2010, of a Francophone day for road safety. France is also strengthening its bilateral ties with countries such as Algeria, Senegal and Lebanon via agreements that promote the exchange of good practices.

The Secretary-General's third report (A/70/386) since the beginning of the Decade of Action for Road Safety illustrates the multitude of actions undertaken. I therefore welcome the commitment of all actors engaged in this fight, the World Health Organization, the Economic Commission for Europe and the entire United Nations system — all of which, in collaboration with Governments, non-governmental organizations and civil society in its entire, do considerable work.

Just as in Brasilia, France will continue to play its part in this mobilization in the service of all, in particular the most vulnerable, ensuring that no one is left behind. I am sure that these synergies will result in significant progress, thereby saving millions of lives on our planet.

Ms. Girón Tomás (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome draft resolution A/70/L.44, on improving global road safety (A/70/L.44), which is an example of outstanding international cooperation in joining the efforts of all Governments and public and private actors to reduce the road traffic accident rate.

In line with international standards and as part of its national public and private initiatives, Spain has appreciably improved road safety. We have noted a cumulative decrease in road traffic deaths between 1989 and 2014 of 82 per cent. In our experience, improving road safety is entirely possible through a defined road safety policy strategy focused on the five road safety risk factors that have been identified at the international level. Of course, a number of technological advantages have been of use, but above all international cooperation among all countries through international organizations at the regional and global levels has been important. Spain has good experience in that area, a good example being our collaborative work with our Latin American colleagues, to whom we will always be grateful for placing their trust in our joint work.

Finally, we would also like to thank the Special Envoy for Road Safety for his excellent leadership and all the support he has given to the road safety initiatives recently developed at the global level. But above all, looking to the future, we should improve road safety globally through cooperation with all actors, both in the public and private actors. Ultimately, we are all citizens.

The Acting President: In accordance with resolution 49/2, of 19 October 1994, I now call on the Observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Mr. Watson (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): I would like to thank the President for the opportunity to provide a brief statement on behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

The IFRC first recognized road safety as a humanitarian crisis in its *World Disasters Report 1998*. Since that time, it has worked alongside its Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to undertake a variety of actions to enhance global road safety. For example, our national societies are widely recognized for the first-aid services and training they provide. In addition, many are actively involved in working with their authorities to develop evidence-based road safety laws and policies, as well as delivering on-the-ground road safety initiatives. Those efforts are supported by our hosted programme, the Global Road Safety Partnership, which works to establish partnerships with Government, the private sector and civil society organizations in order to enhance road safety — in particular in lower- and middle-income countries, where the need is greatest.

We are now at the midpoint of the Decade of Action for Road Safety, and considerable progress has been

made to address this man-made crisis. In that regard, the IFRC would like to commend all those who contributed to the establishment of the Decade of Action and have worked tirelessly to achieve its goals. More recently, the inclusion of truly ambitious road safety targets in the Sustainable Development Goals, the Secretary-General's appointment of a Special Envoy for Road Safety and the organization of the second Global High-level Conference on Road Safety, in Brazil, have provided much-needed political impetus for further global action. However, so much more still needs to be done, and policies must now be put into effect.

While the latest data from the World Health Organization suggests that road fatalities have stabilized at 1.25 million per year, the human and economic costs of road crashes remain staggering. From a humanitarian perspective, the risk of death or injury on the road remains ever-present in many communities around the world. For example, there are cities and towns where vehicles travel at up to 100 kilometres per hour through school zones because the road police have no authority or resources to prevent it. There are also cities and towns where injured road users are provided with no assistance due to a lack of legal protection for good samaritans in their country, and where adults and children falling from motorbikes suffer life-altering head injuries because they are either not required to wear a helmet or have access only to substandard helmets that offer little protection. Events like that happen every day — and are happening right now all over the world. The reality is that, if you are poor or if you live in a rapidly motorizing country, you are likely to experience road trauma at first hand.

Changes need to occur at the local, national and global levels if we are going to achieve our ambitious road safety goals. Of particular importance is the need to build strong multisectoral and multi-stakeholder partnerships. In that regard, we welcome draft resolution A/70/L.44, which lays out clear actions for Member States, United Nations agencies and other relevant stakeholders. In particular, we support the call for Governments to pass and implement strong road safety policies that are locally relevant and evidence-based. To maximize their effectiveness, such policies should be consistently and uniformly enforced and adequately resourced. More broadly, there is a need for more attention, political will and resources to be devoted to road safety.

For its part, the IFRC will continue to work with all our member States and relevant organizations to realize the goals of the draft resolution. Achieving ambitious road safety targets will not only benefit society as a whole, but will in particular assist the poorest and most vulnerable among us, ensuring that no one is left behind.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in this debate on this item.

The General Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/70/L.44, entitled "Improving global road safety".

I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Botnaru (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): I should like to announce that, since the submission of the draft resolution, in addition to those delegations listed in the document, the following countries have also become sponsors of draft resolution A/70/L.44: Andorra, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Guyana, Hungary, Iceland, India, Japan, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, San Marino, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America and Uruguay.

The Acting President: May I take it that the Assembly wishes to adopt draft resolution A/70/L.44?

Draft resolution A/70/L.44 was adopted (resolution 70/260).

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 13?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 23 (*continued*)

Groups of countries in special situations

(a) Follow-up to the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

Draft resolution (A/70/L.45)

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take action on draft resolution A/70/L.45, entitled

"Modalities for the Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review of the Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020".

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to adopt draft resolution A/70/L.45?

Draft resolution A/70/L.45 was adopted (resolution 70/261).

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Thailand, who wishes to speak in explanation of position on the resolution just adopted. I recall that explanations of position are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Ms. Chartsuwan (Thailand): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. At the outset, please allow me to express the appreciation of the Group of 77 and China to the core facilitators for their const uctive guidance, relentless efforts and unwavering patience during the course of negotiations on the very important resolution 70/261.

The Group would like also to thank our delegations for their constructive engagement and the flexibility shown during the negotiation of the resolution. With 47 of 48 countries officially listed as least developed countries being members of the Group of 77, we cannot overemphasize the importance of the Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review of the Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 for the Group. It is crucial that the upcoming Midterm Review be inclusive in nature, not only in the sense of full-scale State participation, but also with regard to the active and constructive participation of the relevant stakeholders. In that way we may determine the future path of genuine partnership that will enable least developed countries to graduate from least developed country status. In our view, the adoption of these modalities is only the beginning of the process of ensuring that the Midterm Review encapsulates the commitments we made during the course of 2015 to provide a meaningful outcome that will yield enablers key to the successful implementation of those commitments by least developed countries.

The Group of 77 and China looks forward to actively, constructively and substantively engaging with the co-facilitators and all members and observer States in the deliberations on, and the negotiation of, the draft outcome document for the Midterm Review in the lead up to the conference to be held at the end of May.

The Acting President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 23.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.